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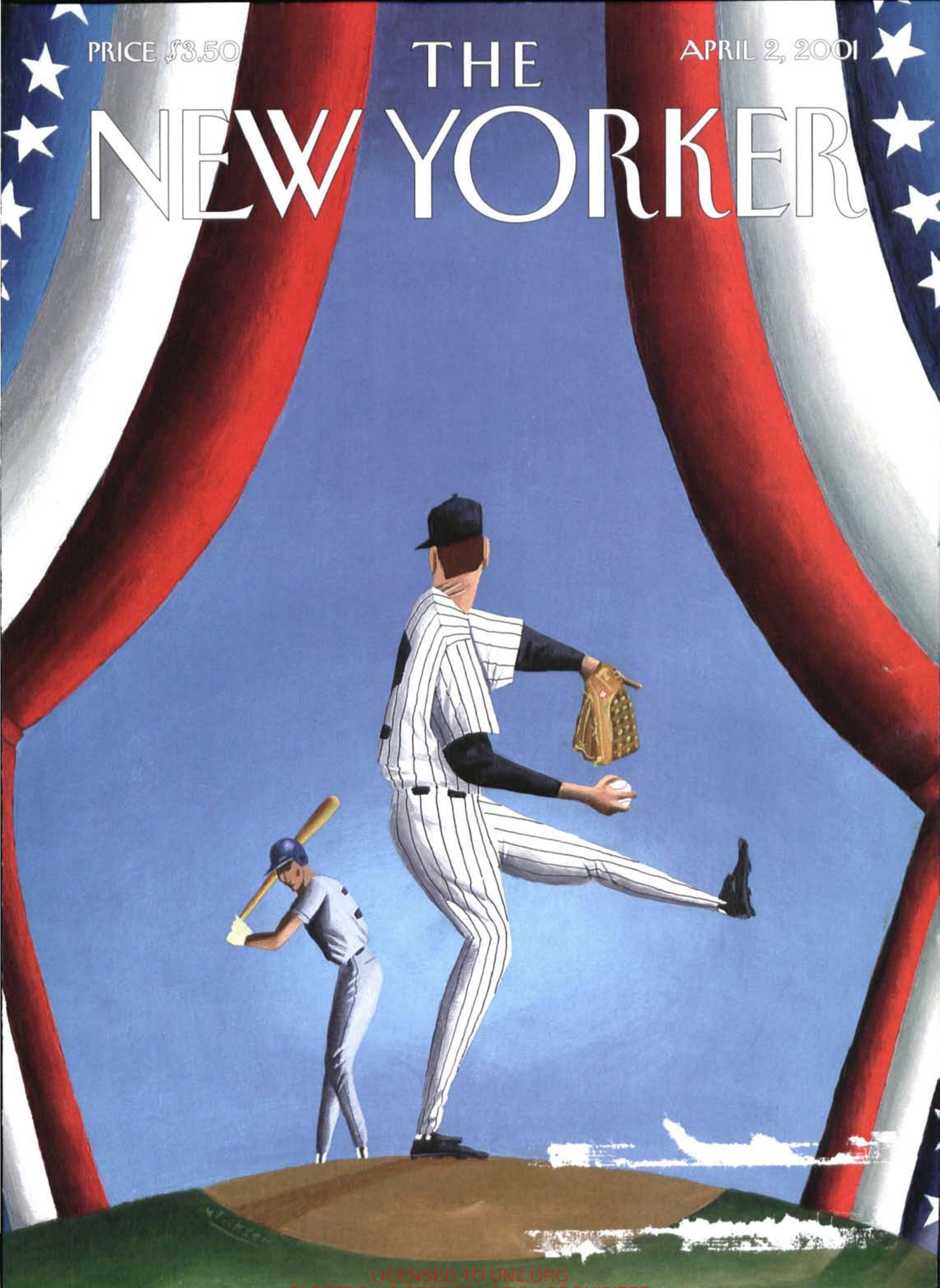
THE NEW YORKER

APRIL 2, 2001



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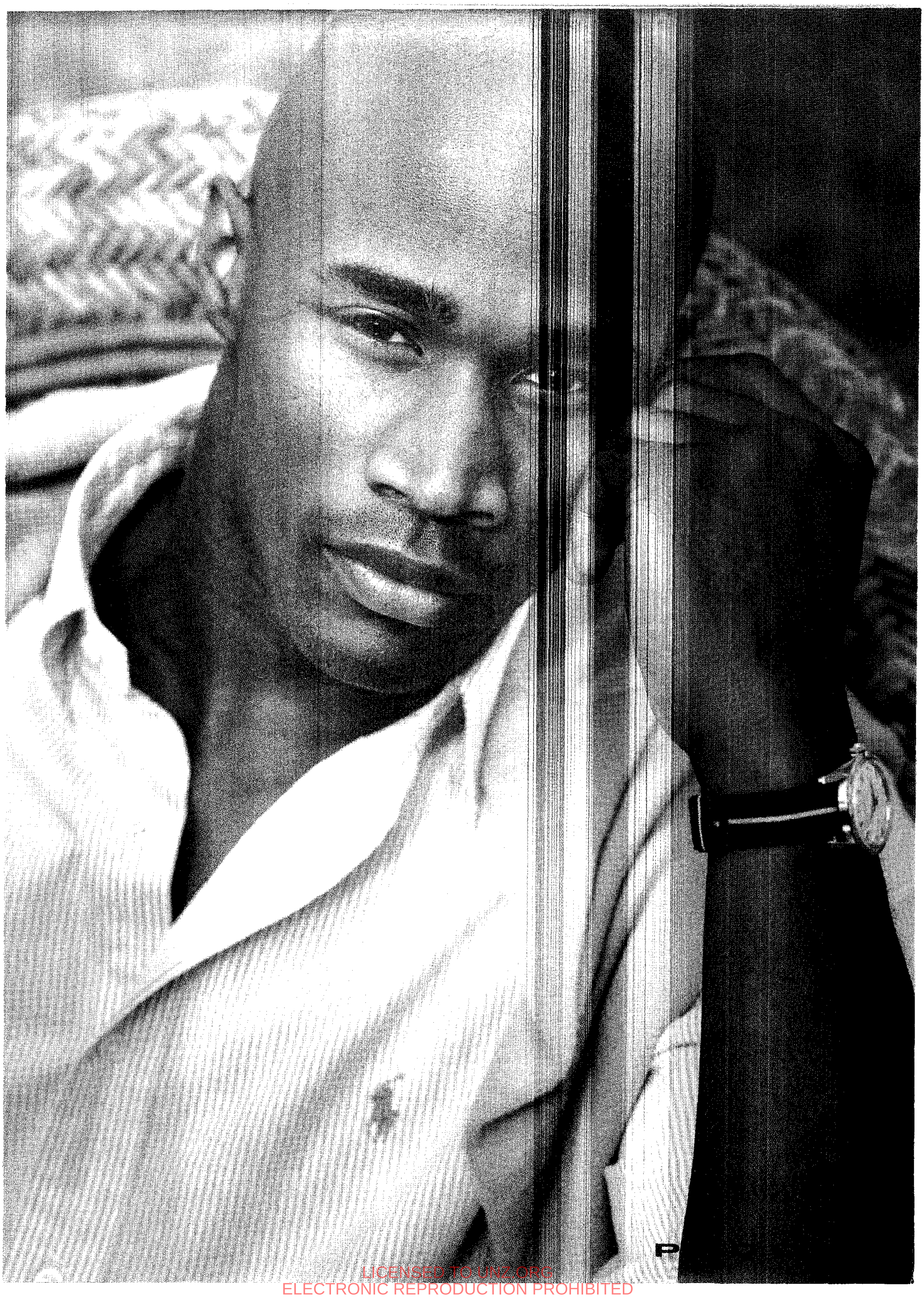
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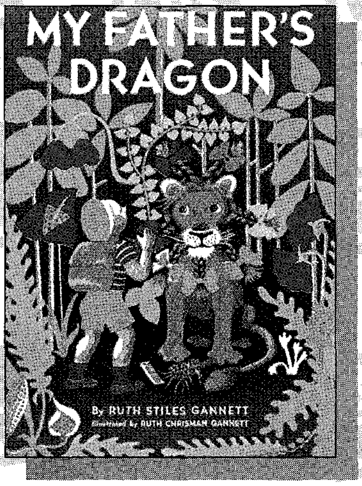

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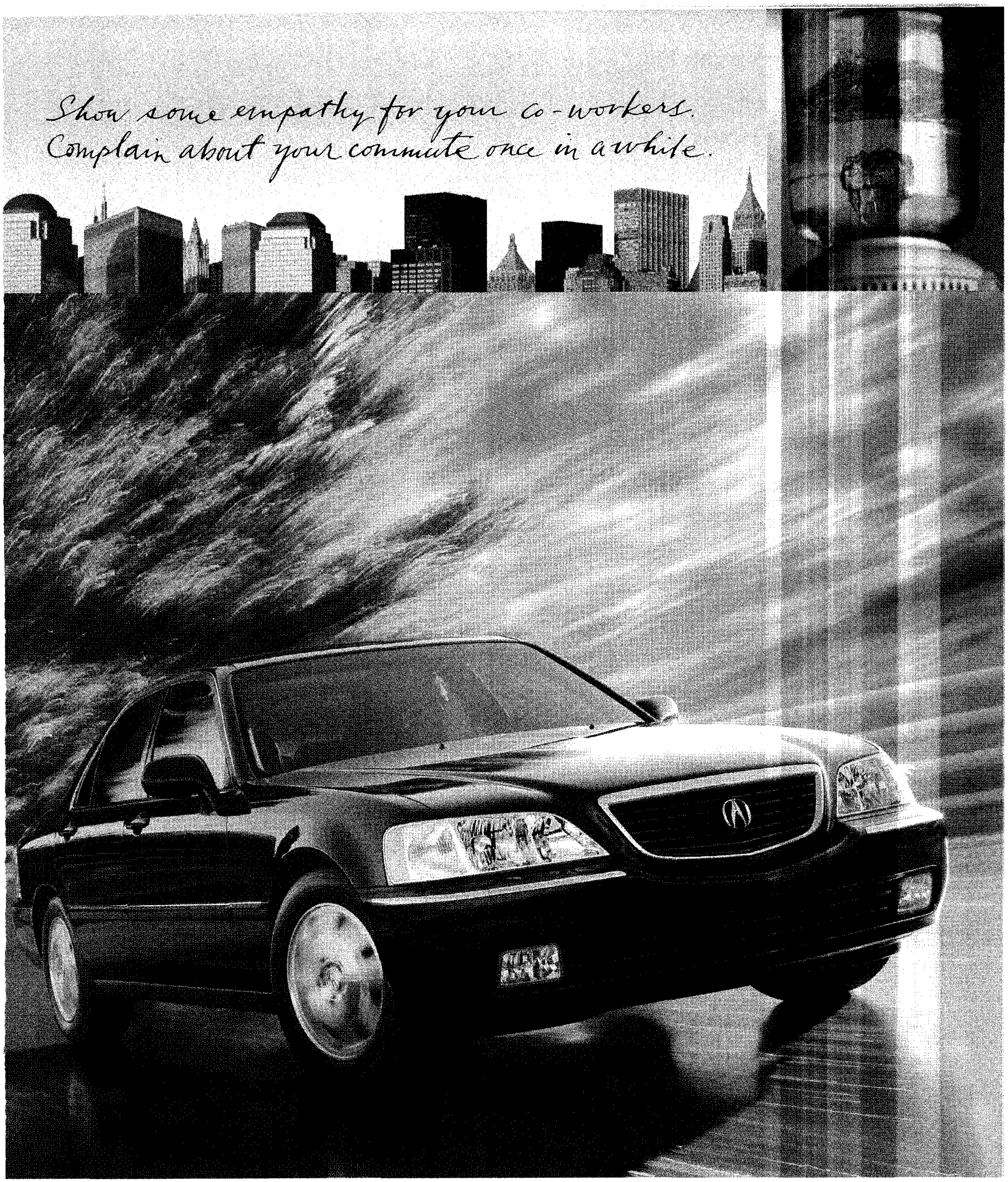
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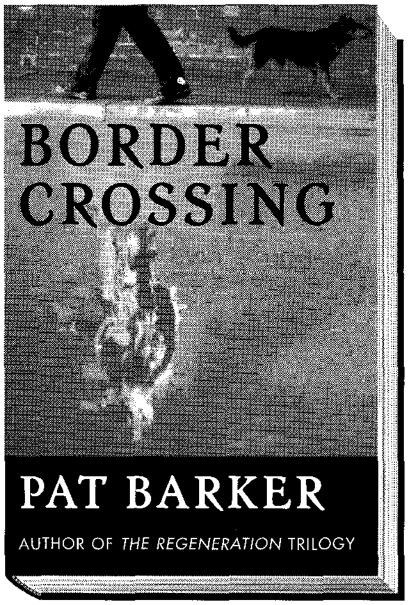

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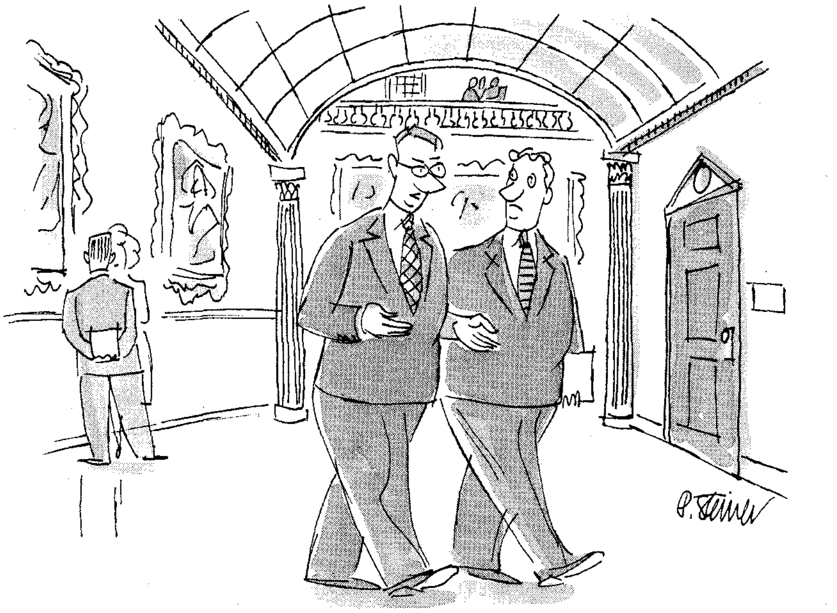

"When you say campaign-finance reform, is that with or without an asterisk?"

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THE MAIL

A SMALL TOWN IN POLAND

Jan T. Gross's account of the July day in 1941 when hundreds of Jews in Jedwabne, a village in Poland, were murdered by their Polish neighbors—a massacre that had long been attributed to German invaders—is painful to read and difficult to comprehend ("Neighbors," March 12th). The President of Poland, the Prime Minister, the Primate, and many others, representing all strata of Polish society, have spoken out in response to Gross's findings, and have made it clear that there are black stains on our history which need to be confronted. Jedwabne is one of them. It is our duty to pay homage to the victims and uncover the full story. Nevertheless, we cannot allow this case to be used to tell a false story about Polish co-responsibility for the Holocaust or inborn anti-Semitism. This would not only be an injustice to the millions of Poles who, along with their Jewish sisters and brothers, perished at the hands of the Nazis; it would, above all, be an injustice to subsequent generations who are building a better world by learning from the tragic events of the past.

Przemyslaw Grudzinski
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland
Washington, D.C.

As a Jew born in Poland in 1929, I survived the Holocaust thanks to my parents' enterprise and our good luck. But many Polish Jews survived only because of the help of their Polish compatriots. The picture Gross paints is, instead, one of bitter hatred on the part of Poles for their Jewish neighbors, hatred that culminated in the brutal crimes at Jedwabne. In fact, the Polish underground sent a special courier to London in 1942 to raise an alarm about the Holocaust; the Allies ignored the message. In Nazi-occupied Poland, those found by the Gestapo to have given refuge to Jews were summarily executed, sometimes with their entire families, in front of their houses, as an example to their neighbors. In Israel today, at Yad Vashem, there is an Avenue of the Righteous, a tribute to Gentiles of different nations who helped Jews during the Holocaust, with a tree planted for each. Almost half are planted in honor of Poles.

Steve Kraus
New York City

Gross's reliance on testimony taken in the Stalinist courts of postwar Poland is disturbing for those familiar with that time. These were the same courts that imprisoned members of Zegota, the Polish underground organization dedicated to helping Jews. In those years, no important case was prosecuted without a political motive. Judges were appointed only with the approval of Communist authorities, and many defendants were tortured. This is not to deny that people were murdered in Jedwabne. Gross's work may be useful as a beginning point, but it is as yet far from a definitive history. The future of Polish-Jewish relations is too important to subject his thesis to anything less than the most rigorous scrutiny.

Steven Kaminski
Ypsilanti, Mich.

Gross writes, "Had Jedwabne not been occupied by the Germans, the Jews would not have been murdered by their neighbors." Perhaps, but neither that nor the fact that many non-Jews died diminishes the responsibility of the Poles in this town who were spectators, abettors, and perpetrators. (Ninety-two were identified by name.) Gross tells of one Pole, Antonina Wyrzykowska, who hid seven Jews on her farm outside Jedwabne; elsewhere in Poland, many others, including members of the clergy, sacrificed their lives to protect Jews. How many could have been saved if even half of Jedwabne's Poles had followed their example?

Zygmunt Wardzinski
Johnstown, Pa.

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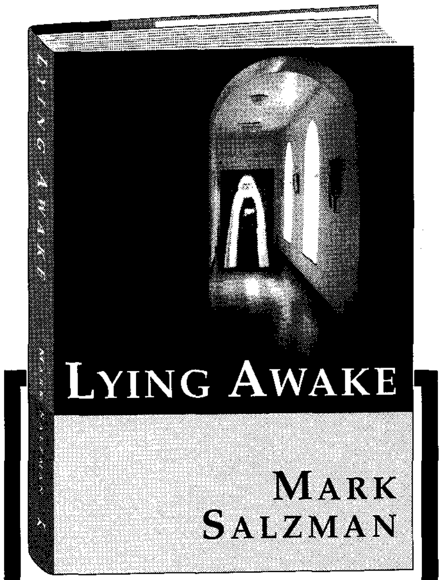

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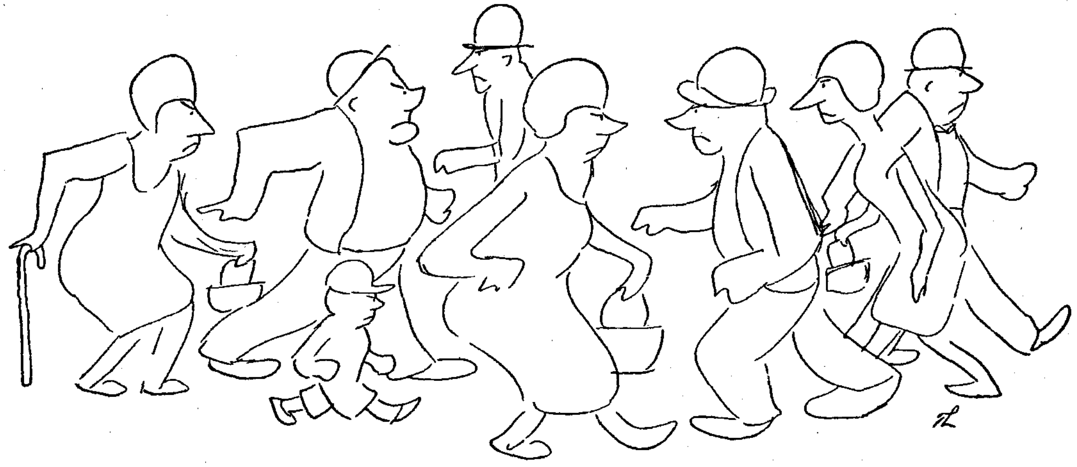

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BELLS ARE RINGING
Faith Prince and Marc Kudisch lead the cast in a revival of the 1956 Betty Comden–Adolph Green–Jules Styne musical about a telephone operator who falls for a playwright. Tina Landau is the director. In previews. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

CODE OF THE WEST
Mark R. Giesser's play about the San Franciscan Joshua A. Norton, who proclaimed himself emperor of the United States and protector of Mexico in the eighteen-fifties. Preview on March 28. Opens March 29 at 8. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

FOLLIES
A Roundabout Theatre Company revival of James Goldman and Stephen Sondheim's 1971 musical, starring Blythe Danner, Gregory Harrison, Judith Ivey, and Treat Williams. Matthew Warchus is the director. In previews. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE INVENTION OF LOVE
Tom Stoppard's latest play stars Richard Easton and Robert Sean Leonard, who portray the poet A. E. Housman at the end of his life and as a young man. Jack O'Brien is the director. Two previews on March 28. Opens March 29 at 6:45. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

NO NIGGERS, NO JEWS, NO DOGS
Primary Stages presents a new play by John Henry Redwood, about a black woman's friendship with a Jewish scholar in North Carolina in the forties. In previews through April 1. Opens April 2 at 7. (354 W. 45th St. 333-4062.)

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
From Chicago, a Steppenwolf Theatre revival of Dale Wasserman's adaptation of the 1962 Ken Kesey novel, starring Gary Sinise. Terry Kinney is the director. In previews. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

PASSION PLAY
Peter Nichols' 1981 dark comedy, about a couple destroyed by an affair. In previews. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

PEARL THEATRE COMPANY
Presenting Jean-François Regnard's 1708 comedy, "A Will of His Own," in a new translation by Michael Feingold. Previews begin March 29. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

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THE PRODUCERS
Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane star in Mel Brooks's musical version of his 1968 movie, under the direction of Susan Stroman. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

REFERENCES TO SALVADOR DALI MAKE ME HOT
Rosie Perez portrays a lonely army wife whose husband suffers from Gulf War syndrome, in a new play by José Rivera. In previews. (Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

SAINT LUCY'S EYES
Ruby Dee stars as an abortionist in Memphis during the Civil Rights movement, in a drama by Bridgette A. Wimberly. In previews. (Women's Project Theatre, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

STONES IN HIS POCKETS
In Marie Jones's comedy, set in an Irish village during the filming of a big Hollywood movie, Seán Campion and Conleth Hill portray all the characters. Ian McElhinney is the director. In previews through March 31. Opens April 1 at 6:30. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

UP AGAINST THE WIND
New York Theatre Workshop presents a rap-poetry play about the life of Tupac Shakur, written by Michael Develle Winn. In previews through April 1. Opens April 2 at 7. (79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL
A musical inspired by a tabloid story about a half-boy, half-nocturnal flying mammal. Written by Keythe Farley and Brian Flemming, with music and lyrics by Laurence O'Keefe. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

THE BOOK OF LIZ
The Drama Dept. presents a new comedy by the Talent Family (David and Amy Sedaris), about an unappreciated nun who flees her conventional life. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

BOY GETS GIRL
Although Rebecca Gilman's new play begins with a blind date, this is no romance. Rather, it's a thriller, whose basic story line you've seen many times before on TV and in the movies. There are several fine performances—from Mary Beth Fisher, as a besieged magazine writer, and Howard Witt, as an incorrigible seventies pornographer—but the merits of Gilman's ideas about sexual politics are ground down under the lockstep march of the melodramatic plot. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/5/01.) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 8.)

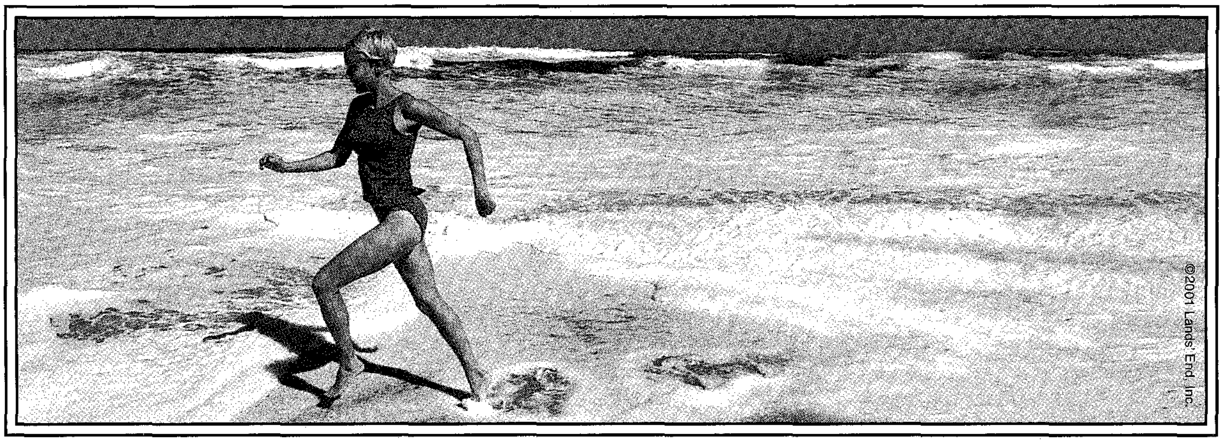
CARTAS: A NUN IN LOVE
A stage adaptation of the seventeenth-century "Lettres de la Religieuse Portugaise," said to be correspondence from a Portuguese nun to a French officer who deserted her, translated and performed by Myriam Cyr. (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 529-4530.)

A CLASS ACT
Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this musical. With songs by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. Mr. Price is the director. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

DESIGN FOR LIVING
To be great, comedy must be cruel, and that is why it is usually written by the young. Though he wrote it when he was only thirty-four, Noël Coward's (then scandalous) 1933 tale of an insouciant ménage à trois (Jennifer Ehle, Dominic West, and Alan Cumming) is more a lecture masquerading as theatre; it's too schematic and too self-important for the cruelty to play out in surprising ways. Here, the director Joe Mantello has encouraged the scenic designer Robert Brill to go gargantuan with the sets, as a kind of metaphor for the characters' grandiosity, and it's a choice that unwittingly emphasizes the gimcrack quality of the play's structure. Otherwise, the production is superbly cast and well focussed. (3/26/01) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

THE DINNER PARTY
Neil Simon's new comedy, set in an opulent restaurant in Paris, is essentially traditional fare; the running, or limping, gags are in ready supply, and the secondhand shtick, often in the form of aeons-old alimony jokes, flows freely along this Boulevard of Broken Marriages. (11/6/00) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DOGEATERS
In Jessica Hagedorn's adaptation of her celebrated 1990 novel, which takes place in the Philippines, political corruption and American pop culture have turned a tropical paradise into a media whispering gallery. With its delirium of talk shows, movies, beauty pageants, discos, Catholicism, and capitalism, the nation's imagination has been colonized by the West, and the indigenous has all but disappeared. Hagedorn sees the Philippines as a soap opera, and the metaphor is right. It's Michael Greif's sluggish production that is wrong. It has no racing pulse or dreamlike frenzy; instead,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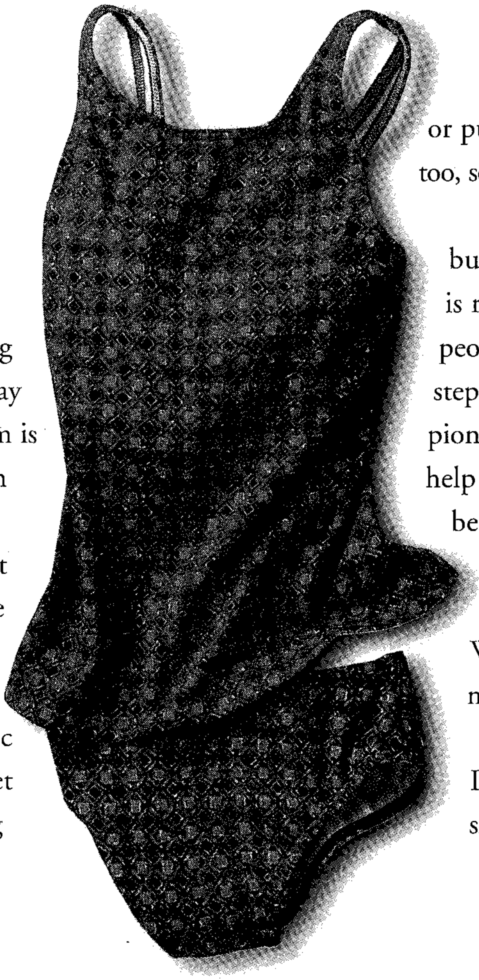

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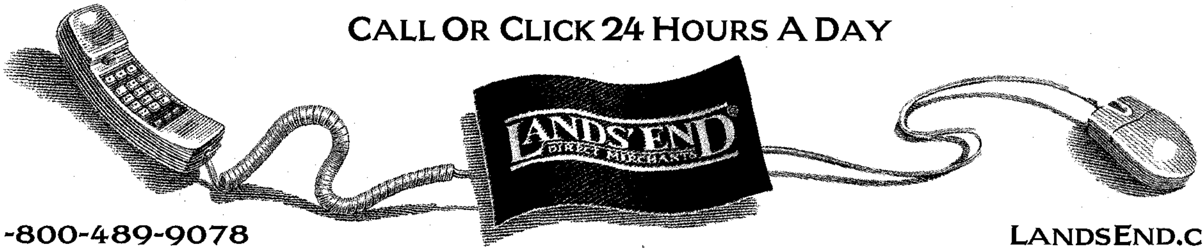

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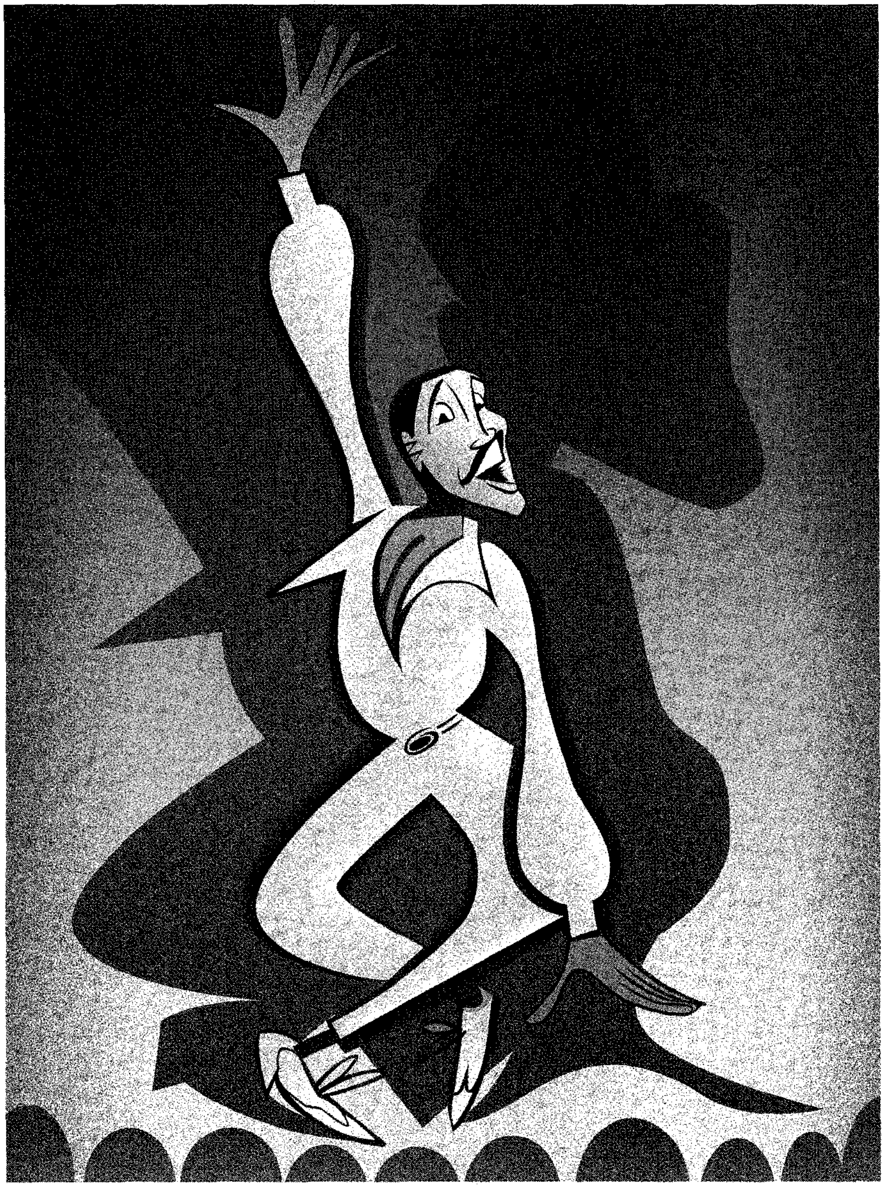

CLASS ACT *If you said that Harold Nicholas was the greatest tap dancer of the twentieth century, you wouldn't get much argument. He and his brother Fayard were so good that Southern movie houses that cut black acts out of movie musicals often kept in their dances. The Nicholas Brothers' stunts—in one film, they jumped out the window of a moving train and landed in splits—earned them a reputation as a flash act, but their glory actually lay in their musicianship. They brought tap into the swing era. Fayard was more lyrical and had prettier hands; Harold had more speed and precision. Harold died last summer. On March 29, a tribute to him at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (7 P.M., no tickets necessary) will feature clips of his performances. Max Roach, Annie Ross, Savion Glover, and, of course, Fayard will be there. —Joan Acocella*

ROBERT RISKO

it's a series of plodding, adequately acted snapshots, which bring the phantasmagoric and the historical together in one heavy-handed, camp package. (3/19/01) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes April 1.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
These days, ridiculing Broadway is like shooting fish in a barrel, so it's amazing that the latest version of Gerard Alessandrini's long-running satirical revue manages to fire off as many good ones as it does. Thank goodness the wonderful Christine Pedi is still in the show; her loopy, loving imitations of yesteryear's biggies—Elaine Stritch, Liza Minnelli, Ethel Merman, and Barbra Streisand—are more than worth the trip and the price of a ticket. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

THE FULL MONTY
Terrence McNally and David Yazbek's musical version of the 1997 movie, about a group of unemployed factory workers who try to earn some cash by stripping, has all the spirit and charm of the original but on a much larger, pizzazzier scale. If you don't find yourself laughing consistently (and tearing up occasionally), well, then, maybe you don't *deserve* to see six men prancing around in red G-strings. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

THE GATHERING
Will Power's one-man show blends hip-hop and African-American folklore to explore what he considers the primary meeting places for black men: the barbershop, the basketball court, the street, and the world of music. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

IN DREAMS AND GIMPEL
An evening of plays adapted from two short stories, Isaac Bashevis Singer's "Gimpel the Fool" and Delmore Schwartz's "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," both starring David Margulies. (Maverick, 307 W. 26th St. 239-6200.)

ISN'T IT ROMANTIC
The Worth Street Theatre Company's staging of Wendy Wasserstein's 1983 comedy, directed by Jeff Cohen. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St., at West Broadway. 206-1515. Closes April 1.)

I WILL BEAR WITNESS
A stage version of the diaries of Victor Klemperer, a German Jew who recorded his life under the Third Reich. George Bartenieff, who portrays Klemperer, and Karen Malpede, who directs, collaborated on the adaptation. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210. Closes April 1.)

JANE EYRE
John Caird and Paul Gordon's musical is respectful of and faithful to Brontë's original, but it needs to be brilliant and piercing, and it isn't. Though the show's book is a fair job, the music is schmaltzy, and the modern stage devices—the endless projections of trees and sky may make you feel like you're watching the Weather Channel—don't quite bring Brontë to life. The appealing cast is led by Marla Schaffel, who is the very picture of the Jane Eyre in your mind's eye. Directed by Mr. Caird and Scott Schwartz. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG
Maximilian Schell and George Grizzard lead the cast in the Abby Mann drama. John Tillinger is the director. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6280.)

LOBBY HERO
In another era, the contrivances in Kenneth Lonergan's new play, set in the lobby of a Manhattan apartment house, would have been called hokum. The security guard ponders why he was dishonorably discharged from the Navy for smoking pot. His ambitious black boss, a rules freak, is forced to jeopardize his career by lying to the police in order to keep his brother—the probable murderer of a mother of three—out of jail. The two hapless cops investigating the murder, one sleazy, the other inept, are having an affair. But because Lonergan is the writer and director of the moving and successful film "You Can Count on Me" and the author of the highly praised plays "This Is Our Youth" and "The Waverly Gallery," the public is expecting him to aim high. Instead, even more galling for a man of his gifts, Lonergan aims low and misses. Mark Brokaw is the director. (3/26/01) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

MNEMONIC
Simon McBurney and his Théâtre de Complicité have winged it over from London to present their latest project, in which the concept of memory is explored through ostensibly unrelated stories. (John Jay College, 899 Tenth Ave., at 58th St. 239-6200.)

NEWYORKERS
A satirical revue about life in Manhattan, by Glenn Slater (lyrics) and Stephen Weiner (music). Christopher Ashley is the director. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

NOW THAT COMMUNISM IS DEAD, MY LIFE FEELS EMPTY
Richard Foreman's forty-eighth play has many of the whacked-out elements audiences have come to expect from the father of downtown theatre—a disorienting set loaded with veiled signifiers, nubile women whose semi-sadomasochistic garb is offset by intellectual-nerd glasses; a gorilla; an outright air of menace; and characters who seem both alienated and—especially lately—somehow perfectly at home in it all. Foreman's plays used to be an enigmatic, exhilarating blow to the brain. With this latest work, the formula has got so comfortable that it seems like shtick. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

NUYORICAN VOICES
A trio of plays by Latino playwrights, performed in rotating repertory: "Giants Have Us in Their Books," by José Rivera; "Unmerciful Good Fortune," by Edwin Sanchez; and "Miriam's Flowers," by Migdalia Cruz. (INTAR, 508 W. 53rd St. 279-4200.)

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY
A stage adaptation by Joe O'Byrne of Oscar Wilde's novel. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY
In Edward Albee's new play, an older couple provide a harsh taste of what life has in store for a young couple with a new baby: the ravages of adulthood, the tidal wave of troubles and injuries that come with time. Brian Murray and Marian Seldes, two veterans who are rarely less than riveting, make the most of Albee's sharp, enigmatic writing; their highly stylized, virtuosic performances here are stunning. David Esbjornson directed. (2/19 & 26/01) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

PROOF
The young playwright David Auburn's drama about the possible link between genius and mental illness stars Mary-Louise Parker as the daughter of a brilliant but unstable University of Chicago mathematician. Parker's character appears to have similar gifts and, possibly, similar troubles. Auburn has real depth and a real voice, and he has taken on some biggies here, but in the end you wish the play were a little richer, a little less simply resolved. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Rather than a revival of Richard O'Brien's 1973 musical, a glam tribute to fifties horror flicks, Christopher Ashley's production is an unsexy and oddly earnest homage to the 1975 cult-movie adaptation. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE
Lily Tomlin is back on Broadway in the one-woman, thirteen-character show written for her by her longtime collaborator, Jane Wagner, and what's not to love about that? Tomlin is terrific—moving, funny, and as lithe and vibrant as she was when she first performed the show here, fifteen years ago. This is a chance to see a remarkable life force in action. (11/27/00) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

SERVICEMEN
From the New Group, a drama by Evan Smith, about a socialite and a playboy who frequent the hangouts of departing enlisted men in New York during the Second World War. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

SEUSSICAL
For all the whimsy of Theodor Geisel's doggerel, what's missing in this relentlessly cute musical by the team of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty is mayhem and magic. With the exception of one gentle and winning performance—by Kevin Chamberlin as Horton the Elephant, who gets conned into hatching an egg—it's a show with curiously little charm. (12/25/00 & 1/1/01) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

A SKULL IN CONNEMARA
The middle play in Martin McDonagh's Leenane trilogy (which includes "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" and "The Lonesome West," both previously seen in New York). Like the others, it is permeated by violence, decay, death, and humor—humor that, in this case, is predominantly of the patronizing, stage-Irish variety and saturated in alcohol. Gordon Edelstein directed. (3/5/01) (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

STARMITES 2001
A revival of the 1989 sci-fi comic-book musical by Barry Keating and Stuart Ross. Mr. Keating is the director. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 206-1515. Closes April 8.)

THE SYRINGA TREE
A tour-de-force solo drama, written by and starring Pamela Gien, a South African native and first-time playwright, who gives an extraordinary performance in all twenty-three roles. It's a love story, really, about the strong, lasting bond between a white girl and her black nanny in South Africa during apartheid. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
As Marjorie Taub, an Upper West Side culture vulture on the verge of a nervous breakdown, the dexterous Linda Lavin makes Charles Busch's satire of New York intellectual angst dazzle. In her pretentiousness, however, she is a gaudy incarnation of the

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PRESENTS

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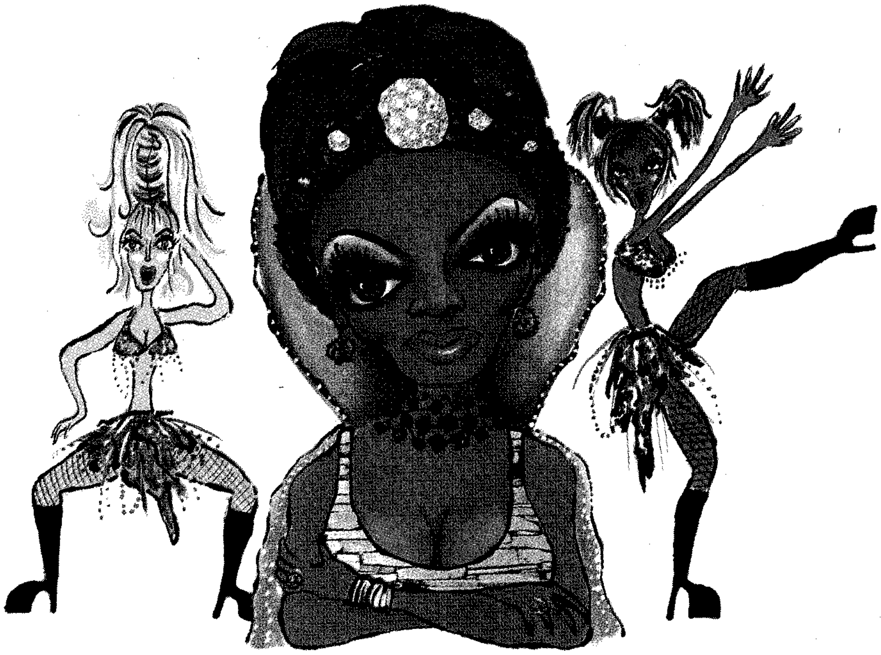
boulevard's contempt for ideas. In fact, as Marjorie herself admits, she has never had "even one original thought." In this piece of slick flimflam, there is attitude but no character, laughter but no insight, action but no plot, suffering but no pain. What we have here, in other words, is a Broadway hit. (3/20/00) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

TEN UNKNOWNS
In Jon Robin Baitz's cunning and elegant play, Donald Sutherland portrays Malcom Raphelson, a hard-drinking seventy-two-year-old figurative painter, who has been holed up in retreat from the art world for twenty-eight years, and Justin Kirk his shaggy, mordant assistant, a "past master in squandered gifts," who is taking a break from "heroin, Ecstasy, show people" to babysit the artist and keep him working. Sutherland's blocked artist, suddenly faced with the prospect of a retrospective and looming fame, raises fascinating issues about symbiosis and envy. Thanks to the marvellous cast (which includes Julianna Margulies and Denis O'Hare), the unassuming authority of Daniel Sullivan's direction, and Baitz's own deft storytelling, the audience is conned into sympathizing with Raphelson the same way that the envious trick themselves into not seeing their own vicious feelings. (3/19/01) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes April 15.)



"Starmites 2001," by Barry Keating and Stuart Ross, at Theatre 3.

ROBERT MELEE

THEATRE OF LIGHT
After a while, the themeless pieces in Rudi Stern's symphony of light, puppetry, and sound (his designs in the nineteen-sixties accompanied Timothy Leary's Psychedelic Celebrations and concerts by the Doors) become repetitive. But when all their elements come together the effect is undeniably entrancing, and would no doubt be enhanced by mind-altering substances. (Flamboyan Theatre, Soto Velez Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk St., between Delancey and Rivington Sts. 279-4200. Closes April 14.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.
ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.
BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.
CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.
CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.
DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.
FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.
KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.
THE MUSIC MAN
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.
TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY
Occasionally, the nearly fifty-year-old company reprises dances from its first decades. This season one of the revivals is "Summerspace," created in the sultry summer of 1958 at Connecticut College in a huge, empty parlor that overlooked a shady lawn. "The dance is supposed to look serene, airy, light—lyric. It's one of what we called 'Merce's nature pieces,'" says Carolyn Brown, Cunningham's principal dance partner from 1953 to 1973. The choreographer has said that his dances don't need to be explained—they stand by themselves and in the moment. But on this occasion, he offered one of his inspirations for the regular and unexpected exits and entrances that mark his work. "He talked about birds flying through," says Brown. "They're everywhere, but you only see what you see in your part of the sky." Besides "Summerspace," the company presents the new piece "Way Station"; "RainForest," from 1968; and the recent works "Interscape," "Biped," and "Pond Way." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. March 31 at 7 and April 3 at 8. Through April 8.)

ELIOT FELD/BALLET TECH
The company, one of the co-founders of the Joyce Theatre, returns for its spring season, performing eighteen repertory works in five weeks, with guest appearances by Damian Woetzel, Donlin Foreman, and Buffy Miller. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. March 27-30 at 8, March 31 at 2 and 8, and April 1 at 2. Through April 22.)

"PARTY"
The twelve-member Dutch company Introdans performs pieces by Hans Van Manen, Ton Wiggers, David Parsons, Conny Janssen, and Daniel Ezralow. The works include "Catch!," in which the dancers juggle glowing balls, and "Sleep Study," a work that takes its movement from the tossing, turning, and yawning of sleep. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 223-3077. March 30 at 7, March 31 at 2 and 7, and April 1 at noon and 5.)

"LOVE, GUTS (CHA-CHA-CHA)"
An evening-length work about a young woman, danced by the choreographer Julie Atlas Muz, who accidentally kills a man. For the remainder of the evening, she kills herself repeatedly, taking time out to join her nine-member all-woman company in kick lines, mambos, and other high-heeled footwork. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. March 29-April 1 at 8:30.)

WENDY OSSERMAN DANCE COMPANY
The choreographer Osserman and her five-member company perform four works, "Trio," "Portrait of a Daughter II," "Anti-Struggle," and "Body of Work," a revival of a work from 1984. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. March 29-April 1 at 8:30.)

"DANCING ACROSS CULTURES"
Seven companies from the Bronx take the stage for a night each (almost; two tango companies share a program to close the festival), in the second annual Bronx on Stage series. March 28 at 2: Full Circle Souljahz. ♦ March 30 at 8: Opus Dance Theatre Company. ♦ March 31 at 8: Gallman's Dance Theatre. ♦ April 1 at 4: Arthur Aviles Typical Theatre. (Lovinger Theatre, Lehman College, 250 Bedford Park Blvd. W., the Bronx. 718-960-8833. Through April 6.)

DANCING CRANE GEORGIAN DANCE THEATRE
The twenty-five-member ensemble performs traditional dances of the Republic of Georgia. (Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 845-986-2638. April 1 at 2 and 7:30.)

HAROLD NICHOLAS TRIBUTE
The tapper is remembered by friends, dancers, and family. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. March 29 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

"ALL-STAR TRIBUTE TO BRIAN WILSON"
A gathering of musical heavyweights, household names, and lesser-known critical faves, including Paul Simon, Elton John, Heart, and Aimee Mann and Michael Penn, sing the praises of one of American rock music's premier songwriters and arrangers. This long-overdue homage features a complete rendition of Wilson's masterwork, "Pet Sounds" (the Yankee equivalent to the Beatles' "Revolver"). Expect lots of zealous harmonizing and an all-star romp through "Wouldn't It Be Nice." (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. March 29 at 7:30.)

JASON MORAN TRIO
You can still hear plenty of Moran's mentors—Andrew Hill, Richard Muhal Abrams, and Jaki Byard—in his piano playing, and more power to him. Channelling the spikier styles of those deep individualists has allowed Moran to stay clear of the tired Herbie Hancockisms that cloud the work of his peers. (Jazz Gallery, 290 Hudson St., near Spring St. 242-1063. March 30-31 at 9 and 10:30.)

VIRGINIA RODRIGUES
Rodrigues is a former manicurist and wedding singer from Salvador de Bahia who was discovered

a few years back by the Brazilian composer and singer Caetano Veloso. She has an ambrosial contralto and is fond of offering meditative tributes to the carnival music of her homeland. With Moreni Veloso, Caetano's son, who is making a name for himself with his electronic-infused bossa nova and samba. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 30 at 8.)

NICK CAVE
Further distancing himself from his squalid previous life—as the bedraggled, fright-wigged front man for Australia's premier post-punk band, the Birthday Party, and, more recently, as a sinister murder balladeer—Cave is evolving into quite a singer-songwriter. This stripped-down solo show promises more introspective crooning than macabre caterwauling. (Town Hall. March 31 at 8.)

RAQUEL BITTON
The Moroccan-born French vocalist with the timeless voice returns to the site of last year's triumphant Edith Piaf tribute concert with a program of Parisian songs from the thirties, forties, and fifties. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 30 at 8.)

TESLA
This Arizona metal band (named for the noted electrical pioneer) broke big in the early nineties with a shameless acoustic cover of the Five Man Electrical Band's 1970 countercultural anthem "Signs." The song almost won them favor with the then-flourishing neo-hippie scene. But the affair was short-lived, and Tesla sank with the rest of the Headbangers Ball regulars. Nearly a decade later, Tesla returns, hoping to recharge rock. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. April 2 at 8.)

RUN-D.M.C.
Catching up with the rock-rap crossover, the Kings of Rock throw their fedoras back in the ring with "Crown Royal," their first album in eight years, which features cameos by Fred Durst, Kid Rock, and Everlast. With the underground rap of the Beatnuts, a.k.a. Psycho Les and Ju-Ju. (Roxy, 515 W. 18th St. 307-7171. April 3 at 9.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—March 27-28: **Delbert McClinton.** Over the course of a long, meandering career that has included teaching John Lennon a few harmonica tricks, in 1962, writing Emmylou Harris's "Two More Bottles of Wine," in 1978, and scoring his own soulful 1980 hit, "Giving It Up for Your Love," this raucous West Texas singer has remained an uncategorizable treasure. He's on tour supporting his latest release, the witty "Nothing Personal."

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 30: The singer-songwriter **Dan Bern** (who also refers to himself simply as Bernstein) is one of the more original performers to have infiltrated the pop scene. His dark, post-folk narratives are as tuneful as they are hysterical. March 31: **Eliza Carthy,** the daughter of the British folk legends Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson. The twenty-five-year-old fiddler, singer, and songwriter has blue-streaked hair and a pierced nose, and favors chunky-soled boots. Her music is a mix of tradition and more up-to-date fashions. With the bluegrass music of **Nickel Creek,** the subcontinental rock of **Church of Betty,** and the Washington a-cappella outfit **DaVinci's Notebook.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—March 30-31: Born from the ashes of the equally hushed Galaxie 500, Dean Wareham's **Luna** proves that you don't have to make a big noise to make a big splash. A long-time favorite of the Lower East Side music scene, Luna has built a substantial following based on their endearing, lo-fi music, which is full of nods to their downtown Manhattan forefathers, the Velvet Underground and Television.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 28: **Mogwai.** Although this Scottish ensemble is named after the cuddly critters in the 1984 movie "Gremlins," there is precious little that is cute and inviting about its music. Masters of icy, largely instrumental, guitar-driven soundscapes, Mogwai dispenses with the trappings of verses and choruses in favor of explorative pieces that range from the ethereal to the abrasive. The Bay City Rollers they are not. March 30: The indie-rock antihero **Stephen Malkmus.** April 3: **Nelly Furtado.** A critically acclaimed songstress and aspiring MTV regular, the Canadian-Portuguese Furtado has cracked the public's consciousness with her slightly cloying single, "I'm Like a Bird." The bottom line though, is her voice, which admittedly can deliver. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—March 29: **Eliza Carthy** (see the Bottom Line).

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—April 3: The Mexican singer **Julieta Venegas** grew up listening to American rock and roll by way of Southern California radio stations; her infectious angular compositions recall introspective singer-songwriters such as Suzanne Vega and spikier artists such as Fiona Apple and Björk. With the Latin rock and hip-hop acts **La Ruta, Volumen Cero,** and **Orixa,** who appear on the new collection "Escena Alterlatina: The Future Sound in Español."

RODEO BAR
375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (683-6500)—The Sun Records veteran **Billy Lee Riley,** known for such rockabilly classics as "Flying Saucer Rock 'n' Roll" and "Red Hot," stops by on March 29.

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—March 30: Led by the American-born but Irish-raised multi-instrumentalist (tin whistle, banjo, fiddle) Seamus Egan, **Solas** has become one of the most acclaimed bands on the contemporary Celtic-music scene. March 31: Arguably the preëminent (and longest-lasting) band from the heyday of garage rock, **? and the Mysterians** (of "96 Tears" fame) inaugurates Underground Garage Saturdays, a monthly series devoted to the homespun music that boasts both the swirl of psychedelia and the unpolished sneer of proto-punk. **Lenny Kaye,** the celebrated rock-history archivist and legendary guitarist from the Patti Smith band, is the host.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through April 21: **Julie Wilson,** the doyenne of New York's chanteuses, is in the midst of a four-week run dedicated to the songs of Dorothy Fields and Amanda McBroom. Dining.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Through March 31: Tito Puente, the timbal master and diminutive dynamo, is no longer with us, but his crack band carries on under the direction of **Dave Valentin,** Latin music's most noted flutist. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through April 1: The **John Scofield Band** and the **Brian Blade's Subterranean Sextet.** The guitarist Scofield is a happily divided man. When the mood strikes him, this influential jazz player slips on his groove shoes and strolls into the funk. His deep love of the blues enables him to move with ease between the two camps. / A former mainstay

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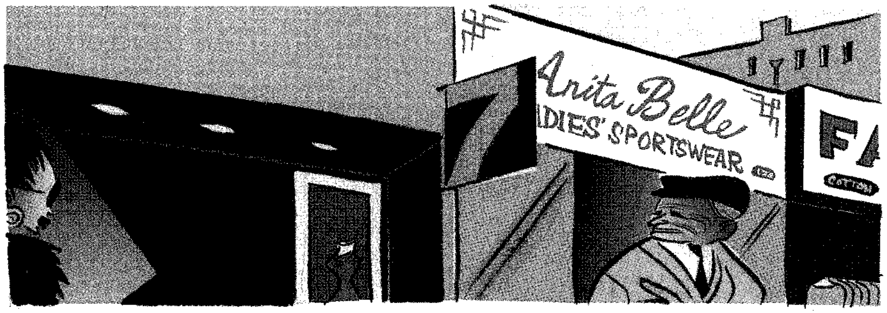
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Give My Regards to Orchard Street



MARCELLUS HALL

Read all you like about real-estate values and restaurant openings on the Lower East Side: it takes an impromptu meeting with a half-century-old $7,000 Cartier wristwatch to snap into focus the wholesale transformation taking place on Orchard Street. **DOYLE & DOYLE ESTATE AND FINE JEWELRY** (189 Orchard St.; 677-9991) is a refined expanse that betrays no trace of its former identity as a leather-goods store with a linoleum floor and ersatz-wood panelling. After an intensive two-month renovation, Elizabeth Doyle and her older sister Pam moved in last year, installing Art Moderne rings, Van Cleef & Arpels powder compacts, nineteenth-century woven-hair memorial brooches, and the Cartier timepiece, a coiled span of eighteen-karat gold with a discreet rectangular face. It looks as if it would have been more at home on Babe Paley's wrist than in a neighborhood that still bills itself as "the bargain district."

For decades, the bargain district's merchants weren't shy about courting customers, and there are lots of vendors who continue their commitment to the old ways, hanging out in front of tenement storefronts and employing, in lieu of a fancy interior design, a rather more direct approach to enticing customers: "Take a look, miss! We got cologne! We got nice leather to fit you! We got the real stuff!" The owners of **SEVEN NEW YORK** (180 Orchard St.; 646-654-0156), a year-old boutique with a poured-concrete façade which looks like a cross between a bunker and a *boîte*, are way too cool to stand in the street and hawk their merchandise, but with a little encouragement they, too, wax enthusiastic about the garments hanging along the store's undulating walls. "The over-all idea was that, because the clothing we sell is so artistic, the shop should be something like an art gallery, but a bent, abstracted art gallery," John Christophe Demas, the shop's architect and co-owner, explains. "You know—white walls, but then we pulled them apart, like the way the clothes are sort of pulled apart. It's heavy-concept stuff." The fashions are quirky, in keeping with this heavy concept, and include a gauzy black shirt by the avant-garde Belgian Bernhard Willhelm—the man responsible for the Michael Jackson skirt Björk wore to the Golden Globes—which is decorated with a fuzzy outline of a cartoon bear and a wreath of black-fabric roses meant to encircle a thin, young neck ($550).

Closer to Delancey Street, **SHEHERAZADE** (121 Orchard St.; 539-1771), a five-month-old shop specializing in furnishings from North Africa and the Middle East, envisions itself not as a deconstructed gallery but as a streamlined seraglio. "I never thought I'd get tired of lifting feathers," sighs Michael Goldwasser, whose fiancée, Kim Koenig, owns the store, describing the labor-intensive process by which more than a thousand peacock plumes were affixed to the overhead pipes. "But after eight hundred feathers you're pretty exhausted. We just didn't want any part of the shop to look mundane." Equal attention has gone into the importation of merchandise, a fantastic assortment that includes seraphim-enhanced hanging glass lanterns ($39), porcelain ostrich eggs from Turkey ($45), and a circa-1920 marble-topped Syrian chest of drawers ($4,500) that has been inlaid with mother-of-pearl in a rose pattern.

—*Lynn Yaeger*

of Joshua Redman's band, Blade is one of the most creative mainstream jazz drummers around, but he casts his net wider when leading his own ensembles by incorporating pop, ambient, and even country elements into the mix.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through April 7, **Christine Andreas.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Peter Mintun** is in attendance through April 28.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Through April 7: The unstoppable veteran **Rosemary Clooney** doesn't consider herself a genuine jazz singer, but that doesn't stop her from swinging away most of the competition. This premier interpreter of the Great American Songbook will be backed by the Big Kahuna and the Copa Cat Pack, Hawaii's reigning neo-swing ensemble.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—March 31-April 1: **Anita O'Day** and **Chris Connor.** She was the girl singer for the Gene Krupa Band back in the early forties and the inspiration for Sugarpuss O'Shea, Barbara Stanwyck's slang-slinging, tough-talking character in the 1942 film "Ball of Fire." At eighty-seven, she's still singing her old standbys (if she feels like it), though her bright, flat sound is on the muted side these days. But her sense of timing, which was always her greatest asset, is as sure as it ever was, and her unvarnished style is terrifically watchable and enlivening. / Nobody gets to the still point of a ballad more quickly than Connor, who is fondly remembered from her days with Stan Kenton. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through April 1: The **Ahmad Jamal** trio. Instead of mellowing with time, Jamal gets more eccentric. A charming minimalist back in the fifties, the pianist has metamorphosed into a verbose extrovert with his own game plan of stop-and-start rhythms, mood-swing digressions, and catch-me-if-you-can shenanigans with his sidemen. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through April 1: After years of insider status, the pianist **Bill Charlap** is beginning to find his way to a wider public. His first recording on a major jazz label, last year's "Written in the Stars," made it clear that confidently swinging, lyrical piano playing wasn't about to fade away anytime soon. Charlap leads a sleek unit with the non-sibling **Washingtons: Kenny** on drums and **Peter** on bass. Dining.

KNICKERBOCKER
33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—March 28-31: The pianist **Judy Carmichael** strides like Fats Waller's long-lost daughter, and, in the saxophonist **Mike Hashim,** she's got a partner hooked into her pre-swing groove.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through April 1: The pianist and composer **Danilo Pérez** stays close to his roots. With his Motherland Project, the leader examines the musical idioms of his native Panama, as seen from a jazzman's perspective. The result is as propulsive as it is thoughtfully considered. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

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MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"The Treasury of the Basel Cathedral."** This stunning collection of relics remained intact for seven centuries, surviving an earthquake, wars, and even the Reformation, only to be dispersed by the fractious politics of the early nineteenth century. Now, thanks to detailed inventories from the period, seventy-five objects, most from the eleventh through the sixteenth centuries, are together again. The emphasis is on jewel-encrusted gold and silver, but there are also assorted textiles, prayer books, and a handsome pair of embellished doors with ironwork as fine as filigree. The show boasts a wide assortment of reliquaries, including an ornately decorated silver foot purported to house the pedal remains of a Holy Innocent, and enough crosses to arm a well-heeled corps of vampire slayers. But the three assemblages made by Swiss nuns in 1903 (in defiance of orders that the fragments of bone and vials of blood be destroyed) are the most remarkable. Each lovingly arranged memento mori is a Victorian valentine to martyrdom, another item for the trousseau of the brides of Christ. Through May 27. ♦ With fifteen paintings by Vermeer (and a possible sixteenth, "Young Woman Seated at a Virginal," which has his luminously impersonal touch), five by the tragically short-lived Fabritius, who may have been his teacher, and ten by his great rival De Hooch, **"Vermeer and the Delft School"** offers an encyclopedic look at the milieu that formed the calmest genius of the seventeenth century. This is the Met at its best: a stately procession of masterpieces, accompanied by informative, sometimes tart commentary. Through May 27. ♦ **"Correggio and Parmigianino: Master Draftsmen of the Renaissance."** Through May 6. ♦ **"Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting."** Through Aug. 19. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Andreas Gursky's radiant, mural-size color photographs depict the patterned world (an unusually straight stretch of the Rhine, balconies stretching up and down a hotel atrium as far as the camera can see) and the lines people make in the landscape (a tiny cable car moving through the mist; a wide, regular stream of skiers traversing an otherwise empty winter scene). Through May 15. ♦ **"Van Gogh's Postman: The Portraits of Joseph Roulin."** Through May 15. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"The Global Guggenheim"** offers a selection of two hundred paintings and sculptures from the far-flung collection, normally housed in museum branches and partner institutions in Berlin, Bilbao, Venice, and St. Petersburg. Through April 22. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"BitStreams"** offers works of art that take advantage of digital technology in various ways, from Jeremy Blake's digital animation and Leah Gilliam's installation of outmoded Macs to works like Jon Klima's "Ecosystem," which shows stock-market fluctuations as branching trees, and gold prices as birds that flock to their shelter. Through June 10. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

GROLIER CLUB
47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—At the time of his death, in 1971, Martin Bodmer had a collection of more than a hundred and sixty thousand books and manuscripts in his Bibliotheca Bodmeriana. Those here, on display in the United States for the first time, range from a primitively powerful Sumatran book of magic, written and illustrated on bark, to an exhaustively worked printer's proof of Proust's "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu," showing changes to the title, subtitle, setting, and first line—and that's just at the top of the page. The curators suggest that viewers transport themselves back in time by imagining the maps Columbus had on hand or envisioning a world without the brothers Grimm, but such notes are unnecessary. This is the kind of intellectual treasure which Indiana Jones and A. S. Byatt characters chew through scenery for, and it's hard not to be seduced. Through April 28. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

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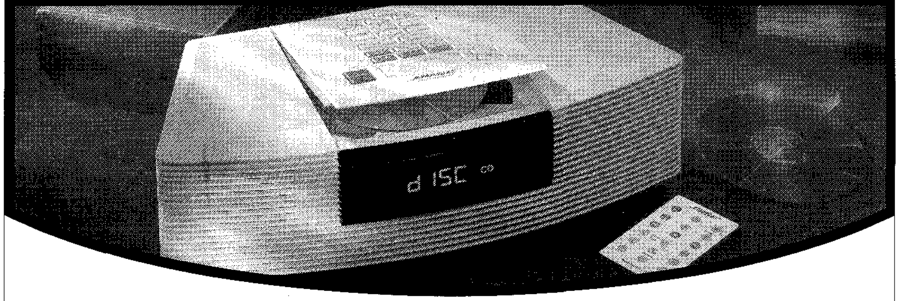

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GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

JEAN DUBUFFET
Entering this show is like arriving at a party at its peak—the energy's humming. The tightly packed installation conveys the urgency of the diminutive paintings themselves, all of which were made in the four years before the artist's death, in 1985. Each composition is densely packed with gestural scrawls and swooping strokes, the palette dominated by, but not limited to, red, white, and blue. Some of the pictures are entirely abstract; others feature the artist's usual cast of crudely drawn characters, happy fugitives from a child's easel. Through April 28. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 988-1623.)

NEIL JENNEY
In 1978, the curator Marcia Tucker coined the phrase "bad painting" to describe an intentionally raw, figurative style that Jenney and others developed around 1969 in reaction to the slick conceits of Photo-Realism. This show focusses on those so-called bad years, and thirty years later Jenney's paintings look as rough and relevant as the day they were made. With his rapid brushstrokes and elemental palette (green, blue, and brown predominate), Jenney cuffs the ears of contemporary painters like Lisa Yuskavage and John Currin. Through April 13. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313.)

TAKASHI MURAKAMI
The sight of three inflatable sculptures, inspired by Japanese *anime*, floating in the Beaux Arts splendor of Grand Central is surprisingly intoxicating. Like a club kid at a débutante ball, the installation loosens up the joint, injecting an unexpected element of whimsy. In addition to a pair of balloon "eye-balls" (spheres decorated all over with an ocular motif) and an upside-down cartoon character named Oval, the room sports a pair of low-slung floor sculptures that look like subcompact U.F.O.s on a lunch break. Through April 13. (Grand Central Terminal, 42nd St. at Park Ave. 878-7178.)

JIM PETERS
The disreputable male gaze is alive and well in these painted constructions, most of which feature female nudes lounging on unmade beds in the near dark. The subject matter may sound Balthusian, but Peters's real debt is to the late Gregorie Gillespie, who invented the odd physical format in evidence here, a hybrid of Contructivist relief, photography, and painting. With their nubile icons set into smoky, dilapidated niches, Peters's works suggest prurient reliquaries. They're genuinely sexy, but one misses Gillespie's more macabre, conflicted voyeurism. Through May 19. (CDS, 76 E. 79th St. 772-9555.)

Short List

BRUCE NAUMAN
Zwirner and Wirth, 32 E. 69th St.
517-8677. Through April 14.

PAUL RESIKA / KATHERINE PORTER
Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606.
Through March 31.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

ELLEN GALLAGHER
The artist continues her uneven progress as a master of piquant, big-scale abstract pictures. On a ten-foot-tall canvas she calls "They Could Still Serve," blue-lined notepaper sheets, arranged in her familiar grid, are saturated with pinks, creams, and, in one case, a plangent lavender, all overlaid with drizzled orangish glue and tiny painted eyes that gaze askance. It's alarmingly beautiful. Another winner, "Bling Bling," embeds a cascade of minuscule cutout shapes in a rubbery, powerfully sensual black medium. But other works seem almost calculated to fail, with arbitrary images imposed on delicately touchy fields that are allergic to them. It's as if Gallagher were demonstrating life-or-death power over her pictures by publicly killing one now and then. Through April 14. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.)

GARY HUME
Most of this celebrated Brit's shiny, inert images look mystifying at first: flat archipelagoes of enamel paint, in colors like Prada green, lime, and aubergine. Gradually, even the most recalcitrant panels reveal distorted hockey-mask faces, generally off kilter or upside down. They could be corporate logos for an association of vertigo sufferers. The rest of the work on view—Warholesque pastiches and a suite of "snowman" sculptures—is presumably meant to prove that Hume isn't just coy. Through April 21. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.)

BEVERLY SEMMES
The artist is best known for making absurdly oversized garments, and the absent body continues to haunt her work. The centerpiece of this show is a giant mound of fluorescent-yellow soft-sculpture tubes. Its evocations range from scatology by way of Sesame Street to entrails tainted by toxic waste. Whatever the association, the coiled heap is by turns ridiculous and repugnant. Through April 14. (Leslie Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 255-8450.)

JIM SHAW
The artist transforms his nighttime reveries into eclectic works of art which he dubs "dream objects." The results are heavy on post-Pop psychedelia and range from portraits of Serbian basketball players with tiny fangs to a life-size sculpture of Santa Claus in a tire swing, with ivy sprouting from his lap. The last is ponderously subtitled "(Somebody worried that Charles and Diana's sons were retarded since he was so old when they were conceived)." Analyze this. Through April 21. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100.)

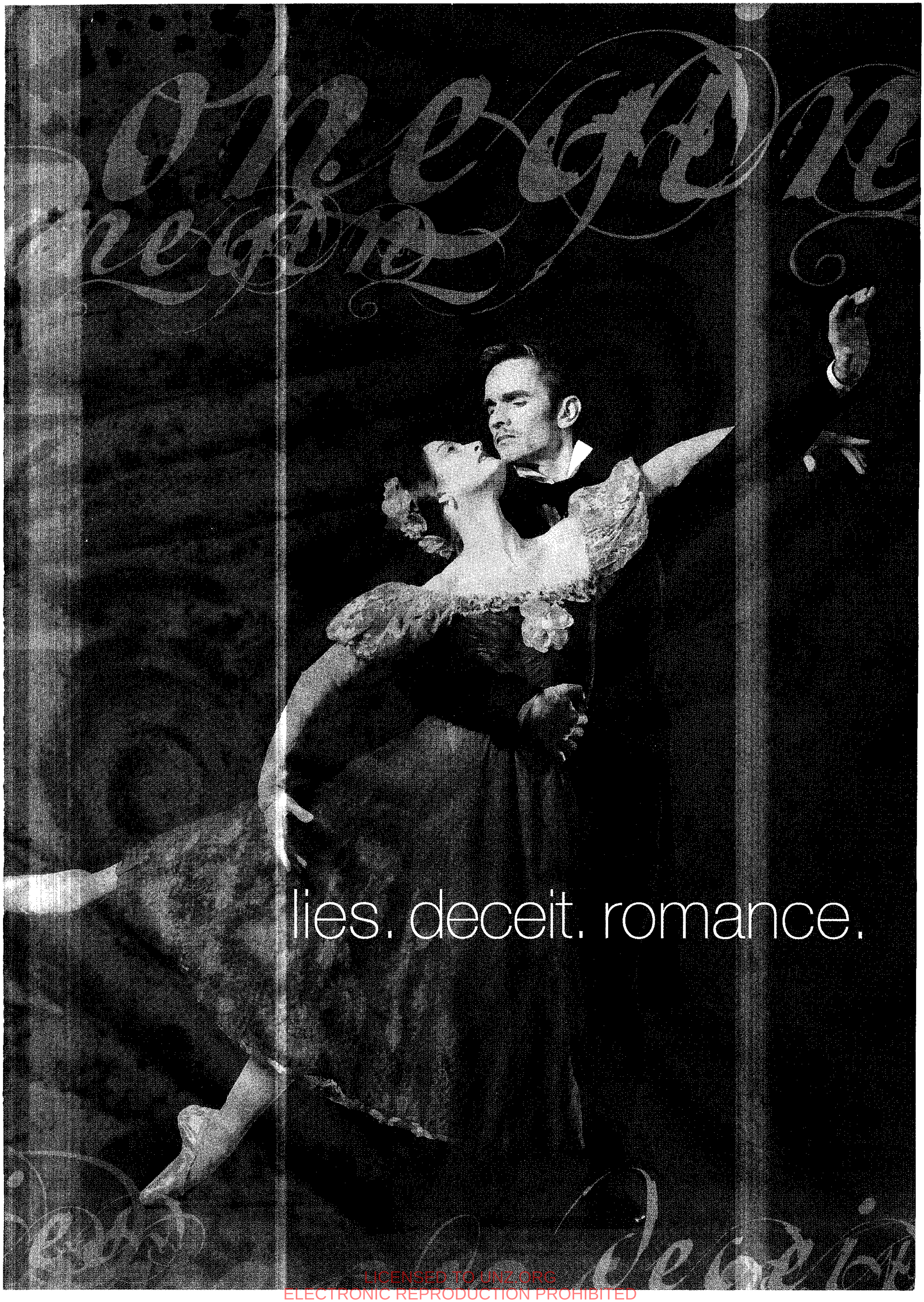
Short List

RAY JOHNSON
Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.
Through April 21.

MARIA MARSHALL
Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219.
Through April 14.

TERRY WINTERS
Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0300. Through April 28. See also Galleries—Downtown.

Charlie White's alter ego, Joshua, in "Ken's Basement," one of a series of tableaux in which he stars (see Photography).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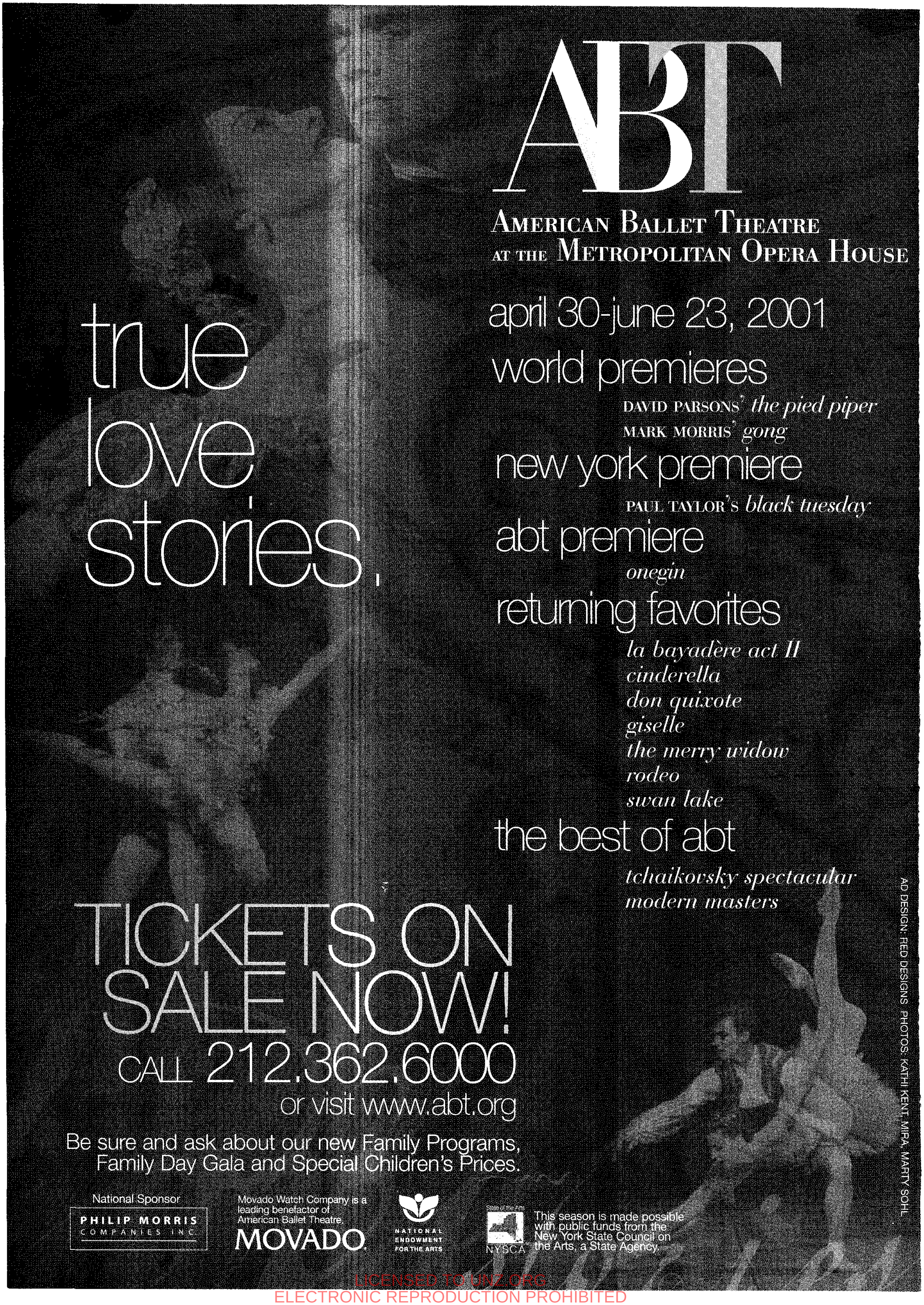

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GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

CHRIS MARTIN
The Williamsburg-based artist offers a pair of black-and-white abstract paintings in two sizes: large and extra-large. Both are composed of three stacked rectangles, like vast bureau drawers, topped by a curving headboard. Cued by the titles, "Full Moon Over Furlow Lake" and "Long Lake," one realizes that they are also stylized nocturnal landscapes. The Ping-Pong-ball-size white circles in "Long Lake" even register, with a little effort, as stars. This isn't the first time abstraction and landscape have gone for a midnight dip together, but Martin's version (imagine a Rockwell Kent woodcut repainted by Al Held) sneaks up on you with its tranquil monumentality. Through March 31. (Malca, 580 Broadway. 966-8854.)

TERRY WINTERS
Though it has been billed as a site-specific collaboration between Winters and Rem Koolhaas, the installation here consists simply of plywood sheets, on which the artist's smallish new paintings have been hung in a crowded Salon-style array that climbs one wall and part of the ceiling. The works themselves, painted in casually muddy blues, reds, and grays, show Winters brainstorming, laying out ingredients (grids, arrows, rosettes, and a webby, undulant mesh) for larger compositions. Presumably, an enterprising art student, if he spent long enough here, could make Winters's next paintings before he does. Through April 28. (Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. See also Chelsea—Short List.)

Short List

PAUL MC CARTHY
Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.
Through April 7.

AUCTIONS & ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
March 29 at 2 and March 30 at 10 A.M. and 2: Continental furniture. Highlights include a pair of Italian gilt-wood-and-composition Empire benches, circa 1810, and a neoclassic writing table made of fruitwood, engraved bone, and marquetry, circa 1785, probably of Russian manufacture. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

CHRISTIE'S EAST
April 2 at 6: A sale of fine wine. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

DOYLE
March 28-29 at 10 A.M.: A sale of jewelry, watches, silverware, and coins, to benefit the Provident Loan Society. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

INTERNATIONAL ASIAN ART FAIR
The final day of the exhibition, featuring a range of furniture, sculpture, bronzes, jewelry, ceramics, textiles, pictures, and more. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 642-8572. March 28.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

RICHARD BARNES
Barnes, known for his photographs of the Unabomber's shack, taken after it was moved to an F.B.I. warehouse, continues to seek resonance in found architecture—this time the bird's-nest collection of a California zoology foundation. The black-and-white prints here highlight sexually suggestive structures (some conical, some triangular), while those in brilliant color find household items sloppily woven into the nest walls (fluorescent dental floss, plastic Easter-basket grass). But Barnes can't resist stretching a little too far; he nearly kills the amateur ornithological fun with a backdrop of bird-themed wallpaper. Through April 7. (Urbach, 526 W. 26th St. 627-0974.)

SIMEN JOHAN
Last year this Norwegian photographer showed black-and-white digital collages of disturbed children cavorting in surreal landscapes. Now he's back with color film and a big enough budget to stage and cast complete tableaux of plucky, lonely kids, though he still tampers with the work in post-production. The best pieces here smack of Grimm's Fairy Tales—in one a naked little girl covered in dirt makes a ritual of lining up cigarette butts as a pig wanders by. The rest merely strike a mopey, save-the-children note. Through April 14. (Gallery 24, 552 W. 24th St. 414-0370.)

ANNETTE LEMIEUX
Lemieux's photographs of children and flowers and birds are so charming, or cheesy, that they verge on parody. Undeniably clever installations give her larger works greater appeal, but still no more heft than their offhandedly clichéd beauty allows. A paper print of the artist draped over a tree stump bubbles roundly out from the wall, gauzy fabric images of sea and sky ripple in wind from small fans, and the watery portion of a black-and-white river scene stretches out onto the floor of the gallery. Through April 14. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave. 685-5951.)

CHARLIE WHITE
To begin "Understanding Joshua," White first constructed him: a slightly smaller-than-human-size figure whose strange features mingle the wrinkled, empathy-eliciting physiognomies of E.T. and Ron Mueck's "Dead Dad," of "Sensation" fame. Joshua's high, furrowed brow; wide eyes and mouth; and slack, hairy skin are painfully, pointedly vulnerable. White's staged pictures of him—ever uncomfortable and yearning—at a cocktail party, in a locker-room shower, and "At Her Place" provoke both laughter and sympathy. Through April 7. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
The three shows opening at I.C.P.'s Midtown space this week, Kiki Smith's reinterpreted fairy tales, Hans Bellmer's ever-reassembled dolls, and a collection of Victorian daguerreotype portraits of male friends—some of whom look to modern eyes like couples—share a somewhat roundabout approach to intimacy. They stake out the territory between coy and explicit, somewhere near suggestive. All shows opening March 29. (1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

OLIVER BOBERG
Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752.
Through April 28.

CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI / JEFF WALL
Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.
Through April 14.

KATE BREAKEY
Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 627-2410.
Through April 21.

"NIGHTLIFE"
Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.
Through April 15.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Elijah Moshinsky's new production of Verdi's **"Nabucco,"** a great, rough-hewn jewel of an opera, is a triumph by almost any measure. John Napier's sets effectively fill the entire stage without Zeffirelli-style clutter; James Levine delivers a flawlessly paced account of the score; and the Met chorus, singing "Va, pensiero," compresses itself into the single character—the Jewish people—that Verdi demands. With Andrea Gruber (as Abigaille), Marianna Tarasova (as Fenena), Gwyn Hughes Jones (as Ismaele, in his début), Frederick Burchinal (in the title role), and Dimitri Kavrakos (as the Hebrew priest Zaccaria). (March 28 at 8.) ♦ With Maria Guleghina replacing Gruber, Wendy White replacing Tarasova, Juan Pons replacing Burchinal, and Samuel Ramey replacing Kavrakos. (March 31 and April 3 at 8.) ♦ Otto Schenk's production of **"Parsifal"** returns to the repertory with a cast full of eminent Wagnerians: Violeta Urmana (as Kundry, in her Met début), Plácido Domingo, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, Ekkehard Wlaschiha, and John Tomlinson; James Levine. (March 29 and April 2 at 6:30.) ♦ **"Il Trovatore,"** with Michele Crider, Irina Mishura, Richard Margison, Valery Alexeev, and Dimitri Kavrakos; Carlo Rizzi. (March 30 at 8.) ♦ Prokofiev's **"The Gambler"** may be more of a sung prose play than a conventional opera, but in Temur Chkheidze's new production it is a riveting entertainment from the first note to the last. All the necessary elements are present: a strong, mostly Russian cast (including Elena Obraztsova as the noble grandmother and Vladimir Galouzine as the demented gambler Alexei); sets (by George Tsypin) and costumes (by Georgi Alexi-Meskhishvili) that mix the luxurious with the bizarre; and an orchestra, led by Valery Gergiev, that can bring both lustre and grit to the composer's relentless accompaniment. (March 31 at 1:30.) ♦ The Met holds the Grand Finals concert of its National Council auditions, an opportunity to hear some of the best young voices in the country at more reasonable prices than the Met usually offers. Deborah Voigt is the m.c.; Paul Nadler conducts. (April 1 at 3.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
In his new production of **"La Bohème,"** the director James Robinson gets all the little things right. We may never quite buy his updating of the work to the beginning of the First World War—why aren't these uniformed starving artists out at the front?—but he certainly knows how to move people around a stage. (The sets are by Allen Moyer, though their childlike innocence is a characteristic Robinson touch.) Working with a fresh young cast of singing actors, he makes Puccini's sentimental tragedy into something utterly believable, and subtly expressive; if at the end the show feels a little smaller than it should be, then the New York State Theatre's spotty acoustics are probably at fault. With Maria Kanyova, Nicole Heaston, Rolando Villazon, and Alfredo Daza; George Manahan. (March 28 at 8 and March 31 at 8.) ♦ Harold Prince's production of **"Don Giovanni"** returns to the repertory, with Sally Wolf, Oksana Krovytska, Mariateresa Magisano, David Pittsinger, Matthew Polenzani, Kevin Langan, Valerian Ruminski, and John Marcus Bindel; Steuart Bedford. (March 29 at 7:30, March 31 at 1:30, and April 3 at 7:30.) ♦ **"Tosca,"** with Amy Johnson, Alfredo Portilla, and Jeffrey Kneebone; Richard Buckley. (March 30 at 8.) ♦ Mark Lamos's new production of Handel's **"Acis and Galatea,"** with Christine Brandes, William Burden, John Tessier, and Dean Elzinga; Jane Glover. (April 1 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Christoph Eschenbach conducts Mahler's taut and tragic Symphony No. 6 and several songs by Strauss (including the inevitable "Morgen"), with the soprano Barbara Bonney. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. March 29 at 8, March 30 at 2, and March 31 at 8.)

ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS
A genuine event: the pianist Murray Perahia makes his New York conducting début, directing (and playing) a concert of music by Handel, Bach, and Mozart (the Symphony No. 40 and the Piano Concerto No. 17). (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. March 28 at 8.)

LONDON SINFONIETTA
The pianist Peter Serkin has cancelled his performances with the Sinfonietta, but the concerts, under the direction of Oliver Knussen, will continue. March 28 at 8: Music by Schoenberg, Knussen ("The Way to Castle Yonder"), Alexander Goehr ("Konzertstück," with the pianist Phillip Bush), and Takemitsu, and two pieces by Stravinsky, the enigmatic "Movements for Piano and Orchestra"

(also with Bush) and the "Requiem Canticles," the most affecting and approachable of his later works. The singers Susan Bickley and Jan Opalach and the New York Choral Artists assist. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.) ♦ The scene shifts to Weill Recital Hall for two concluding chamber concerts, in which members of the Sinfonietta are joined by the Orion String Quartet. March 30 at 8: Music by Wolpe, Webern, George Benjamin (the extravagant duet "Viola, Viola"), and Knussen. ♦ March 31 at 8: The soprano Lisa Saffer joins the players for a program including music by Knussen, Wolpe, Stravinsky, and Goehr, along with Charles Wuorinen's "Fenton Songs" and Peter Lieberson's "Free and Easy Wanderer," a quintet for piano and strings. (247-7800.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Leon Botstein leads the ensemble in a program of twentieth-century German music, composed in homage to Beethoven, by Max Reger, Franz Schmidt, and Richard Strauss (an arrangement of "The Ruins of Athens"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. March 30 at 8.)

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA
Riccardo Chailly brings the renowned Dutch orchestra to New York for two concerts of German classics. April 1 at 3: Mahler's Symphony No. 10, along with the "Rückertlieder" (with the baritone Matthias Goerne). ♦ April 2 at 8: Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra, along with Brahms's Double Concerto (with the violinist Vadim Repin and the cellist Misha Maisky) and Symphony No. 1. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500.)

THE SIXTEEN
This virtuoso group of London singers blends the precision of the English cathedral tradition with a sumptuous modern sound. They sing music by Byrd, Palestrina, and Victoria at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola. (Park Ave. at 84th St. 721-6500. April 1 at 4.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
Music by Handel, Kile Smith, and Sibelius (the Symphony No. 1). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. April 2 at 2 and 7 and April 3 at 8.)

CHOIR OF SAINT THOMAS CHURCH
The choir and the New York Collegium present Bach's Mass in B Minor. (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 664-9360. April 3 at 7:30.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA
Hugh Wolff conducts a program of Shostakovich (the Violin Concerto No. 1 and the Symphony No. 9) and Stravinsky (the "Symphony of Psalms," with the Juilliard Choral Union). (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. April 3 at 8.)

RECITALS

MUSIC AT THE 92ND STREET Y
March 28 at 8: The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet presents a program of contemporary music inspired by the Latin and Celtic traditions and by the sounds of the Indonesian gamelan. ♦ April 3-4 at 8: Emmanuel Pahud, a flutist with stunning technique and an opulent tone, recently stepped down from the principal post at the Berlin Philharmonic to pursue a solo career; he joins the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio for a program of music by Haydn, Bach, Prokofiev (the Sonata for Flute and Piano), and Tchaikovsky (the majestic Trio in A Minor). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500.)

BARGEMUSIC
March 29 and March 31 at 7:30: The violinist Mark Peskanov coördinates a concert of string music by Mozart (the Divertimento for String Trio) and Beethoven (the "Harp" Quartet, Op. 74). ♦ March 30 at 7:30 and April 1 at 4: A more thought-provoking program, mixing the Baroque (Biber's "Sonata Representativa") with the modern (Ravel, Schoenberg, and Shostakovich). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

FAZIL SAY
The highlight of this young Turkish pianist's recital is a performance of the four-hand arrangement of "The Rite of Spring"—which he plays by himself, having previously recorded two of the hands on a Yamaha computer-controlled piano. This is no mere stunt: his recent recording of the work, on Teldec, is as inventive as it is exciting, and evokes both the brutality and the refinement of Stravinsky's orchestration. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 29 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE
The Parisii Quartet performs "The Book for String Quartet," by Pierre Boulez, a fifty-year work in progress. (Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 30 at 8.)

NEW YORK ART ENSEMBLE
Todd Reynolds, New York's reigning classical-jazz violinist, leads "Still Life with Mic," a multimedia event featuring music by two more performer-composers, Evan Ziporyn and Michael Lowenstern, and by Preston Stahly. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 226-2407. April 3 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE REVEREND BILLY
Bill Talen looks like a preacher and sounds like a preacher, and his twenty-member gospel choir couldn't be more authentic. But there's something different about the services at his Church of Stop Shopping. They often take place in downtown theatres and feature such lines as "Take your hand from the product, children, just put that product down!" and readings from works by bell hooks or Noam Chomsky. Right now the church's spring revival is in full swing, featuring the Rev's eloquent rants against Starbucks, Disney, and other transnational corporations. Attendees have the opportunity to repent during the Exorcism of Credit Cards, and the Induction of Saints honors activists fighting for local control of businesses and community properties. The spring revival continues on April 1 at 8 with a show titled "They Paved Paradise and Put up a Shopping Mall: The Hudson River Park SCAM!" The Reverend says, "This is a humorous ministry, but it gets really serious when you're trying to stop the selling of our waterfront." (45 Bleecker Theatre, 45 Bleecker St., at Prince St. 529-4530. New services each Sunday, through April 15.)

"PEOPLE'S POETRY GATHERING"
Long, long before poetry appeared on the page, it was an oral form, and this festival celebrates the pleasures of live verse with three days of readings and musical performances. Highlights include an opening-night reading by Stanley Kunitz and performances by the dub poets Linton Kwesi Johnson and Jean Binta Breeze. The following day starts with the actor Oliver Platt offering passages from the works of Dr. Seuss and ends with a midnight reading of Edgar Allan Poe by the undertaker poet Thomas Lynch in the Marble Cemetery. In between there are performances of Korean epics and Cambodian and Hmong poems, as well as a panel discussion on lost languages. The final day features a Federico Garcia Lorca tribute, with Robert Bly, Carol Conroy, and others; an afternoon reading by the rock-and-roll poet Patti Smith; and an evening concert by Smith and her band. (Most events are in the Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. For more information, call 800-333-5982, ext. 5, or visit www.peoplespoetry.org. The festival runs March 30-April 1.)

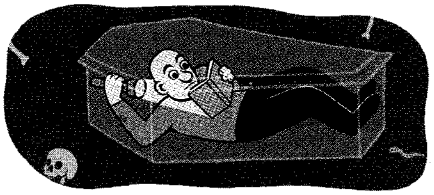
MORE READINGS
March 28 at 8: By the poets Eavan Boland, Edward Hirsch, and Richard Howard, from the works of Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron, respectively. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799.) ♦ March 29 at 7: By Nuala O'Faolain, from her novel, "My Dream of You." (Glucksman Ireland House, New York University, 1 Washington Mews. 998-3950.) ♦ April 2 at 7: By the poets Galway Kinnell and Carolyn Kizer. (Vanderbilt Hall, New York University, 40 Washington Sq. S., at MacDougal St. No tickets necessary.)

TALK
March 29 at 7: Edmund White, John Berendt, Philip Lopate, J. D. McClatchy, and Sarah Schulman discuss their contributions to the recently published anthology "Loss Within Loss: Artists in the Age of AIDS." (New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. 873-3400.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Tales from the Crypt

"There are certain themes of which the interest is all-absorbing, but which are too entirely horrible for the purposes of legitimate fiction." So begins "The Premature Burial," Edgar Allan Poe's gruesome tale about being interred before death. In **BURIED ALIVE** (Norton), Jan Bondeson describes how this "most primal fear" took hold in days before doctors had a reliable way to identify conclusive signs of death and depended instead on such tactics as leaving patients on tables until putrefaction set in. The desire to avoid both this indignity and an untimely grave produced the security coffin—a casket rigged with air holes and bells to allow a misdiagnosed corpse to communicate its predicament to the outside world. Mistake-proof coffins are still around; just a few years ago, a Tuscan watchmaker designed a coffin equipped with a telephone, a flashlight, and a heart stimulator.



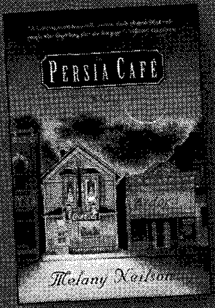
No amount of gimmickry will rouse the inhabitants of the Chiesa dei Cappuccini in Palermo, Sicily, home for four hundred years to the mummified remains of monks and nobles and their families. **THE LIVING DEAD** (Westzone) pairs a semifictional text by Laura Facchi with transfixing photographs by Marco Lanza which capture the mummies' gape-mouthed, stoic, and occasionally beautiful faces.

In **THE WAY OF ALL FLESH** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), the Dutch biologist Midas Dekkers argues that things are in fact at their most beautiful as they decay, and that our aversion to deterioration robs us of many aesthetic pleasures. If we delight in aged wine, moldy cheese, and ancient, crumbling buildings, why shouldn't we admire the beauty of the elderly or even the dead? After all, he writes, "it doesn't all end with death. Dying only gets into full swing after death."

—*William Cohen*

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

NOVEL NEWS


Persia Café
Melany Neilson

DISCOVER AUTHOR

MISSISSIPPI

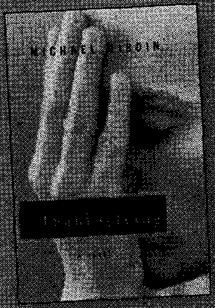
Violence erupts in a small town when a young black boy disappears. Fanny, a cook at the café, may be the only one able to piece together the true story.

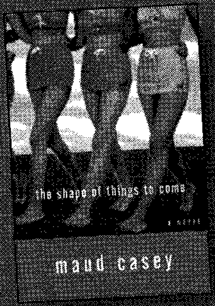
THE PERSIA CAFÉ
by MELANY NEILSON
Pub. Price: $23.95
Our Price: $19.16
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.24

OBSESSION

Grief-stricken by the death of his wife, Anthony embarks on an obsessive journey to discover details of her life before they met.

THANKSGIVING
by MICHAEL DIBDIN
Pub. Price: $20.00
Our Price: $16.00
Readers' Advantage Price: $14.40


Michael Dibdin


the shape of things to come
a novel
maud casey

ESPIONAGE

An espionage temp, Isabelle pretends to be other people. Though she revels in disguise, she gradually unearths some truths about herself.

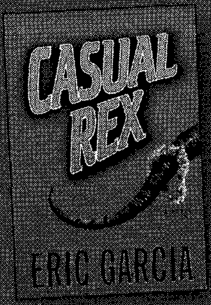
THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME
by MAUD CASEY
Pub. Price: $24.00
Our Price: $19.20
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.28

JAPAN

An American father's investigation into his son's death while studying abroad takes him on a wild ride through the manners and mores of Japan.

AMERICAN FUJI
by SARA BACKER
Pub. Price: $24.95
Our Price: $19.96
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.96

American
Fuji
Sara Backer


Casual Rex
Eric Garcia

DINOSAUR

The dinosaur detectives of *Anonymous Rex* look into a mysterious death at a cult encouraging Los Angeles dinosaurs to "find" themselves.

CASUAL REX
by ERIC GARCIA
Pub. Price: $23.95
Our Price: $19.16
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.24

LINGERIE

When the local lingerie factory closes, a bevy of bra seamstresses seek help and advice at the local community college.

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by LOIS BATTLE
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The Floribama Ladies' Auxiliary & Sewing Circle
Lois Battle

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MOVIES OPENING

AKIRA
A rerelease of Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 *anime* classic, with a dubbed English translation. Opening March 30. (Empire 25.)

AMORES PERROS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 30.

BUTTERFLY
A documentary about Julia (Butterfly) Hill, the Earth First! activist who lived in a tree for two years. Opening March 30.

FAAT-KINE
Ousmane Sembene directed this drama about the family and friends of a woman living in contemporary Dakar. In French and Wolof. Opening March 28. (Film Forum.)

KEEP THE RIVER ON YOUR RIGHT
A documentary about Tobias Schneebaum, a New York painter who in 1955 went to Peru to live with the Amarakaire Indians. Directed by David and Laurie Gwen Shapiro. Opening March 30.

SIMON MAGUS
Ben Hopkins wrote and directed this drama with Noah Taylor as an outcast in a Jewish village in nineteenth-century Europe who sees visions of the Devil. Opening March 30.

SOMEONE LIKE YOU
A romantic comedy with Ashley Judd, Greg Kinnear, and Hugh Jackman. Directed by Tony Goldwyn. Opening March 30.

SPY KIDS
Robert Rodriguez wrote and directed this action comedy about two children who discover that their staid parents (Antonio Banderas and Teri Hatcher) are secret agents. Opening March 30.

THE TAILOR OF PANAMA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 30.

TOMCATS
In order to win a bet, a guy (Jerry O'Connell) must find someone to marry his womanizing friend (Jake Busey), in this comedy directed by Gregory Poirier. Opening March 30.

FILM NOTES

BEFORE NIGHT FALLS
At its best, Julian Schnabel's second film is a memoir of easy and raffish good times—the endless summer days at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. Schnabel adapted an autobiographical memoir by the poet and novelist Reinaldo Arenas (Javier Bardem), a homosexual who was initially a participant in the revolution, then a victim of it, and was finally allowed to leave Cuba in 1980. Schnabel doesn't tell this story coherently: characters appear or disappear without explanation, and we don't always know where we are. The method is closer to collage than to Hollywood script construction, but Schnabel works sensually, and that makes up for a lot. Bardem, who has the face of a shy, smiling bull—a prominent nose, handsome eyes—gives a performance of great charm.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/8/01.) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

THE DISH
A pleasant, even charming, movie, but so determinedly small-scale and personal that it flirts with innocuousness. In a remote, unknown Australian town, a group of local technicians, together with an American from NASA, man a giant telescope tracking the moon shot in 1969. All sorts of embarrassing snafus occur just as the whole world is watching, and the various ambitions and jealousies of the men play into the mess. There's a touching moment when the entire town gathers around the TV to watch Neil Armstrong's first step, and they all realize that he and they have become part of history. Rob Sitch directed.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

ENEMY AT THE GATES
In the midst of the siege of Stalingrad, two snipers—an innocent Red Army peasant from the Urals (Jude Law) and an aristocratic Nazi deer hunter (Ed Harris)—stalk each other in the mucky ruins. This elaborate duel might have been perversely interesting as a kind of military sick joke if the absurdity of it were the point. But the director Jean-Jacques Annaud and his long-time collaborator, the producer-writer Alain Godard, make it seem like the entire battle hinged on the struggle between the two specialists. Although the movie starts well, with horrifying epic scenes of the Red Army sacrificing thousands of men to stop the Germans, it rapidly loses all common sense and excitement. With Joseph Fiennes as a hack Party intellectual who makes the Soviet sharpshooter a national hero and Rachel Weisz as a brave Red Army girl who seems to have walked off a recruiting poster. The composer James Horner does an acceptable imitation of Shostakovich's agonized wartime manner.—*D.D.* (3/26/01) (Battery Park 16, Coronet Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

15 MINUTES
There's life and fun in this trashy pulse-of-the-city thriller, much of which is set in and around the media pits of Times Square. Two recent émigrés kick the madness into motion—a Czech psychopath (Karel Roden), who takes the promise of American freedom with alarming literalness, and a movie-loving Russian (Oleg Taktarov), who films his partner's crimes. These two violent screwballs are pursued by a celebrated police detective (Robert De Niro) and a young fire marshall (Edward Burns). Director John Herzfeld serves up fires, knifings, and shootouts, and manages, in the midst of the extreme mayhem, to hammer away at the American habit of turning criminals into media figures. The villain of the piece is a sensationalizing newscaster (Kelsey Grammer) who puts the Russian's videos on the air. The movie is hypocritical through and through, but at least Herzfeld brings humor and rhythm to what he's doing.—*D.D.* (3/26/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE GLEANERS AND I
The French filmmaker Agnès Varda, digital camera in hand, roams around her country recording the movements of gleaners. Traditionally, as in the archetypal Millet painting, gleaners were women who gathered the remains of the harvest; their modern counterparts are mostly scavengers, searching in dumpsters and other likely places. The French, of course, give the practice a wonderfully perverse twist—many gleaners do so by choice, disdainful of wastefulness and rampant consumerism. Varda's photographic eye is much in evidence, and her narration is both shrewd and whimsical. When she leaves a camera on accidentally, she uses the unintended footage to create a "dance of the lens cap," a filmic gleaning that acts as a perfect grace note. In French.—*Michael Agger* (Film Forum.)

HANNIBAL
Ten years after "The Silence of the Lambs," Hannibal Lecter returns to the table. He is played, once again, by Anthony Hopkins, and seems both more placid and more particular in his cravings. Lecter is in Florence, where he is suspected by a local detective (Giancarlo Giannini, the best and most rumpled thing in the movie). Also on the trail is Clarice Starling (Julianne Moore), who is now an outcast within the F.B.I. Huntress and prey finally meet; indeed, we are given to understand that they can barely keep away from each other. The screenwriters, David Mamet and Steven Zaillian, do a good job of sifting the dross from Thomas Harris's novel, and the director, Ridley Scott, gets elegant value from what remains. The locations are lush, the reworked ending could not be neater, and the special effects were apparently devised by an abattoir. There's just one problem, and it's insurmountable: this is not a scary movie.—*Anthony Lane* (2/12/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
The latest film from the talented young Hong Kong writer-director Wong Kar Wai makes us pant for adultery. In the early sixties, in a community of Shanghai refugees living in Hong Kong, Mrs. Chan (Maggie Cheung) and Mr. Chow (Tony Leung) are next-door neighbors in a friendly apartment building. The perfectly dressed and coiffed couple meet, talk, and realize that their frequently travelling spouses are off having an affair with each other. What to do? The movie is all about sensual anticipation. Nat King Cole croons on the soundtrack, and the camera caresses the rain on the streets and the texture of a stone wall in the semi-darkness. So skillfully does the director bring us to a state of breathless expectation that when he refuses to deliver the goods he almost seems to have invented a new form of perversion. In Cantonese and French.—*D.D.* (2/5/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
Amateurish yet funny, in a gross way. A simpleton (Jonathan Haze) who works in a florist shop has a prize plant that becomes a voracious, blood-seeking man-eater. It cries, "Feed me! Feed me!" This 1960 film is notable for the performance that Jack Nicholson gives in a minor role; as a pain freak who is in ecstasy in a dentist's chair, he shows the comic intensity that later made him a star. Directed by Roger Corman.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 31.)

THE LOWER DEPTHS
Jean Renoir's 1936 version of the Maxim Gorky play features those two magnetic poles of French acting—Louis Jouvet as the gambling baron who sinks to living in a flophouse, and Jean Gabin as the thief trying to climb up to a different life. Their scenes together are gems of the French film tradition. This movie has one of those emblematic moments that people talk about for years afterward: Jouvet, having lost everything, comes away from the gaming tables and can't light his cigarette. The scene was for the thirties what Belmondo rubbing his lips in "Breathless" was for the sixties. In French.—*P.K.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; April 2.)

MARCELLO MASTROIANNI: I REMEMBER
A beguiling memoir. The style is discursive, not dramatic, but how better to while away three hours than in the company of the most debonair man in movie history? Right up to his death, in 1996, Mastroianni combined emotional transparency and wit. The attitude he displays here is one of humane irony—toward his work and toward himself. He is acutely perceptive, both about undervalued directors like Germi, Petri, and Monicelli and about giants like De Sica and Fellini; he says that Fellini's improvisations of entire worlds caused even the Maestro's star to feel like a happy spectator. Anna Maria Tatò interviewed Mastroianni and directed this 1997 film. In Italian.—*Michael Sragow* (Symphony Space; April 3.)

MEMENTO

For those who enjoyed getting their heads around "Back to the Future," here is a movie that takes off in the opposite direction. Guy Pearce plays Leonard, a former insurance investigator who has mislaid his short-term memory; leave the room and come back ten minutes later, and he won't remember you. To help his case, and to solve the apparent murder of his wife, Leonard tattoos himself with memoranda and drives around the lowlier districts of L.A. County. At the same time, he has a couple of acquaintances (Carrie-Anne Moss and Joe Pantoliano) who seem eager both to support Leonard and to use his condition for their own unscrupulous ends. There is a fine, despairing comedy to these events—not just in our fidgety hero, but in the constant thwarting of our need to know. After all, the solution to a whodunit is never easy when you can't even be certain what got done. The young British writer and director Christopher Nolan, who has every intention of putting us through the mill, doubles his fun by running the whole story backward. Damn him.—*A.L.* (3/19/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 19th Street East 6.)

At Walter Reade Theatre, "The Tree of the Wooden Clogs," Ermanno Olmi's masterwork about peasant life in Lombardy.

MARINA SAGONA

THE MEXICAN

A shaggy-taco story—one of those south-of-the-border romps in which many people die in odd ways and the Mexicans are either gap-toothed cretins or unspeakably dignified grandees. Brad Pitt is Jerry, a small-time loser sent to Mexico by Los Angeles gangsters to retrieve a fabled handmade pistol; Julia Roberts is his girlfriend, Sam, who loves Jerry but is disgusted with him and flounces off to Las Vegas, where she's kidnapped by a sensitive gay hit man (James Gandolfini). Pitt and Roberts appear together only at the beginning and end of the movie and spend all their time engaging in the kind of noisy, shin-kicking squabble which must be fun to perform but does nothing for the audience.—*D.D.* (3/12/01) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

POLLOCK

A dogged march through the life and work of Jackson Pollock, starting in the early nineteen-forties, when Lee Krasner (Marcia Gay Harden) first approached him in Greenwich Village, continuing through their marriage and other tempests, and ending gloomily in a car wreck in 1956. The film was directed by Ed Harris, who also plays the artist. His face doesn't much resemble that of Pollock, but Harris has mastered the hunched amble and the glaring gaze. His best scenes are not the boozy rants but the quiet times with a cigarette and a brush—or, latterly, a dripping stick. Pollock's drinking was an interruption of his art, not a spur to it, and the film can do little to connect the two; we are left with a sombre study of discontent, enlivened by the appearance of Jennifer Connelly as the painter's final girlfriend. What she saw in him, by that stage, is anybody's guess. With Val Kilmer pretending to be Willem de Kooning.—*A.L.* (3/5/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

SERIES 7

Daniel Minahan's parody of reality television shows is harsh and strident, but it's not without some very funny moments. Shot on video, it presents itself without explanation, encouraging you to feel as though you had stepped into the near future and turned on your TV. The show is called "Series 7" and the contestants, à la "The Running Man," track and kill each other on camera. What's worse (or better) is that the current champion happens to be a pregnant mother (Brooke Smith), and one of the other contestants is her former high-school flame. Minahan takes the manipulative, stagy devices of tabloid TV—along with elements of "The Real World"—and uses them to amplify the drama of his absurd premise. The film eventually trips over its own feet: it wants to play a joke on the audience ("Why are you laughing?") but also to be just a joke ("Please laugh").—*M.A.* (Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.)

THE TASTE OF OTHERS

In the provincial city of Rouen, a married factory owner named Castella (Jean-Pierre Bacri) falls in love with a local actress after seeing her perform in a production of Racine's "Bérénice." The actress, Clara (Anne Alvaro), a refined, lonely woman, hangs out with the other actors and a few local artists—a closed bohemian circle—and is appalled by her wealthy admirer, who tells blundering, unfunny jokes. This pleasingly observant and intelligent movie was written by Bacri and his partner, Agnès Jaoui, who directed the movie (plainly but effectively) and also appears in it as a free-living bar girl. Bacri and Jaoui are fascinated by manners in both the smaller and the larger sense: What holds a group of people together? What relationships make a happy life possible? The movie suggests that small groups united by taste may have their comforts, but without a sudden alteration of taste—sometimes called love—no true movement in life is possible. In French.—*D.D.* (3/12/01) (Eastside Playhouse, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

WALLACE AND GROMIT

It's no wonder that Alec Guinness was devoted to Nick Park's signature creations: Wallace, the fubsy bachelor inventor, and Gromit, his long-suffering canine companion. Although Wallace and Gromit are plasticine figures, moved by hand, their daft, deft cartoon adventures lay claim to the wit and the humanity of classic Guinness comedies (especially, perhaps, "The Man in the White Suit") while paying homage to fantasy and suspense films from "Destination Moon" to "Topkapi." Park's tight plotting, gimcrack machinery, and droll characterizations give off a charm both delicate and pointed. His conceptual masterstroke was making Gromit a silent hero, in contrast to the cheese-obsessed and exclamatory Wallace. Audiences young and old are drawn into the dog's big-eyed expressions of wariness, determination, and ever-so-fleeting contentment.—*M.S.* (Museum of Television & Radio; March 28-April 1.)

THE WIDOW OF SAINT-PIERRE

In the French colony of Saint-Pierre (an island near Newfoundland) during the middle of the nineteenth century, a captain of the guard (Daniel Auteuil) and his high-minded wife (Juliette Binoche) adopt as their protégé a man who has committed a meaningless murder (Emir Kusturica). The murderer is a sweetheart—a gentle and educable fellow. As the community awaits the arrival of a guillotine and an executioner, the captain and his wife refuse to bow to the logic of capital punishment or to administrative bloody-mindedness. For all its stern moral conviction, Patrice Leconte's film manages to duck the only question worth asking: would a less sympathetic murderer be worth saving from the blade? In French.—*D.D.* (Paris.)

ALSO PLAYING

CHOCOLAT

Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Olympia I and II.

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON (12/11/00)

Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 64th and 2nd.

HEARTBREAKERS

Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Union Square, and Waverly.

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH (12/25/00 & 1/1/01)

Quad Cinema and Sutton 1 and 2.

O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? (12/25/00 & 1/1/01)

East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.

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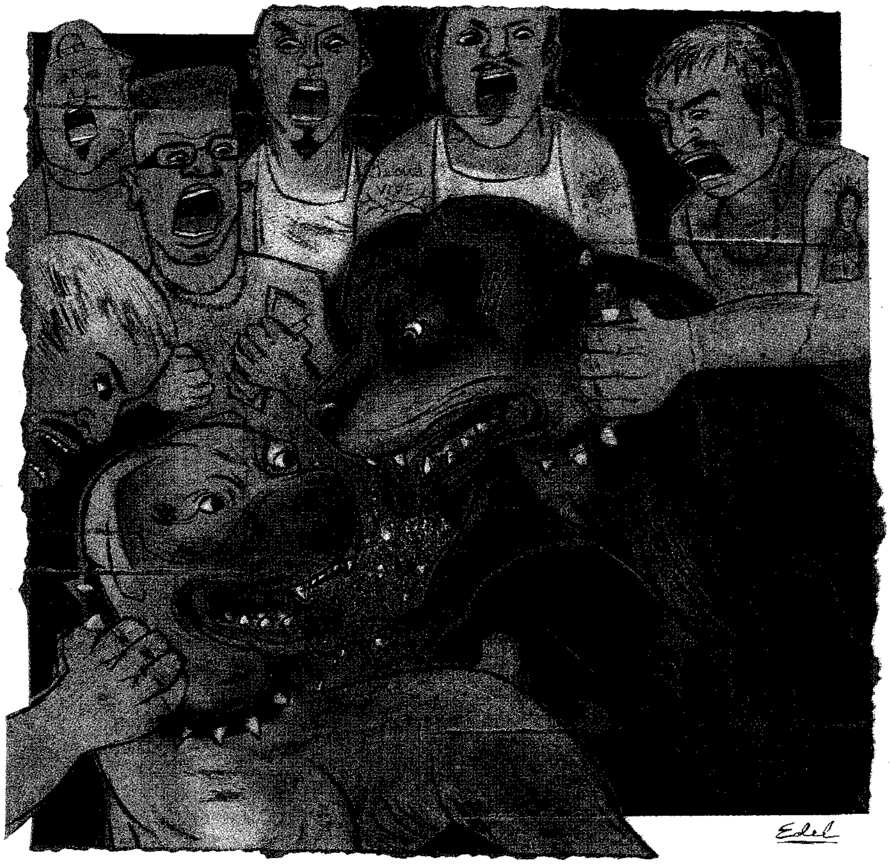
SAY IT ISN'T SO
Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.

TRAFFIC (12/25/00 & 1/1/01)
Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.

YI YI (A ONE AND TWO) (1/8/01)
Cinema Village.



Opening March 30, "Amores Perros," directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME (12/18/00)
Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through April 1: "The Films of William Randolph Hearst." March 31 at 2: "Gabriel Over the White House" (1933, Gregory La Cava). ♦ March 31 at 4: "Going Hollywood" (1933, Raoul Walsh). ♦ April 1 at 2: "The Battle Over Citizen Kane" (1996, Thomas Lennon and Michael Epstein). ♦ April 1 at 4:30: "Citizen Kane" (1941, Orson Welles).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (777-3456)—March 28 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Wind Will Carry Us" (1999, Abbas Kiarostami; in Farsi). ♦ March 29 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Death Race 2000" (1975, Roger Corman). ♦ March 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Raven" (1963, Corman). ♦ March 31 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Little Shop of Horrors" (†). ♦ April 1 at 2, 5, and 8: "Breaking the Waves" (1996, Lars Von Trier). ♦ April 2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Lower Depths" (†). ♦ April 3 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Journey to the Beginning of Time" (1955, Karel Zeman; in Czech).

CINEMA CLASSICS
332 E. 11th St. (971-1015)—March 28-30 at 8 and 10 and March 31-April 1 at 6, 8, and 10: "Sunset Boulevard" (1951, Billy Wilder).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through April 5: "The World of Agnès Varda." All films are in French. March 28-29 at 2:10, 6:10, and 10:10: "Murs Murs" (1980). ♦ March 28-29 at 3:45 and 7:45: "Documenteur (An Emotion Picture)" (1981). ♦ March 28-29 at 1, 5, and 9: "Politics and Rhythm" (1968). ♦ March 30-31 at 2, 5:50, and 9:40: "Jacquot de Nantes" (1990). ♦ March 30-31 at 4:10 and 8: "The World of Jacques Demy" (1993). ♦ April 1 and April 3 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "La Pointe Courte" (1954). ♦ April 1 and April 3 at 2, 5:20, and 8:40: "Castles, Love and a Naked Man" (1957).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION & RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through April 29: Screenings of "Traffik," the British miniseries that inspired Steven Soderbergh's "Traffic." March 29 at 6 and March 31 at 2: Episodes One and Two. ♦ March 30 at 6 and April 1 at 2: Episodes Three, Four, and Five. ♦ "Nick Park's World: The Eccentric Adventures of Wallace and Gromit." (†) March 27-April 1 at 1 and March 29-30 at 6.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through April 8: "New Directors/New Films." March 28 at 6:30: "On Common Ground" (2000, Jessica Glass and David Eilenberg). ♦ March 29 at 9: "Face" (2000, Junji Sakamoto; in Japanese). ♦ March 28 at 9 and March 30 at 6: "Confusion of Genders" (2000, Ilan Duran Cohen; in French). ♦ March 29 at 6 and March 31 at 3: "Lift" (2001, DeMane Davis and Khari Streeter). ♦ March 30 at 9 and March 31 at noon: "Before the Storm" (2000, Reza Parsa; in Swedish). ♦ March 31 at 6 and April 1 at 3: "Nine Queens" (2000, Fabian Bielinsky; in Spanish). ♦ March 31 at 9 and April 1 at noon: "Peppermint Candy" (1999, Lee Chang-Dong; in Korean). ♦ April 1 at 6 and April 2 at 9: "Dinner Rush" (2000, Bob Giraldi). ♦ April 1 at 9 and April 2 at 6: "Wojaczek" (1999, Lech J. Majewski; in Polish). ♦ April 3 at 6: "I Prefer the Sound of the Sea" (2000, Mimmo Calopresti; in Italian). ♦ April 3 at 9: "Hybrid" (2000, Monteith McCollum).

THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—March 30-April 1: Abbas Kiarostami's Koker trilogy. All films are in Farsi. March 30-April 1 at 1:10 and 6:35: "Where Is the Friend's Home?" (1987). ♦ March 30-April 1 at 2:50 and 8:15: "And Life Goes On . . ." (1991). ♦ March 30-April 1 at 4:35 and 10: "Through the Olive Trees" (1994).

SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through May 29: "Cinema Italian Style." April 3 at 7: "Marcello Mastroianni: I Remember" (†).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through April 12: "Salt of the Earth: The Cinema of Ermanno Olmi." All films are in Italian. March 28 at 1 and 6:15: "Cammina, Cammina" (1982). ♦ March 29 at 1 and 6:15: "The Legend of the Holy Drinker" (1988). ♦ March 29 at 3:30 and 8:45: "Long Live the Lady!" (1987). ♦ March 30 at 1, 4:15, and 7:30 and March 31 at 4 and 7:30: "The Tree of the Wooden Clogs" (1978). ♦ April 3 at 3:15: "The Scavengers" (1969).

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POSTMARK BRITAIN

ON ENGLAND'S GREEN

BY SIMON MILLS

What makes a classic English garden? Is it, as London-based gardener and writer Dan Pearson would have it, a sort of horticultural punk rocker, gate-crashing a black tie ball, "a juxtaposition of formality and informality . . . a controlled chaos, all tumbly and jumbly, where one thing is supporting another, where one plant is spilling and spraying over into the next?"

Poet and author Vita Sackville-West, who tended the garden at Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, would have agreed. A vigorous opponent of fastidiousness, she advocated letting self-seeded plants grow where they naturally fell. Let wildflowers, sometimes be allowed to invade the garden, she said. "If roses stray over the path, the visitor must duck."

But Sackville-West also insisted that every garden have a plan. She had a innate talent for juxtaposing plants in terms of mass, height, and color, and would even take a cutting of each new plant around the garden with her, trying its color against others, until satisfied that it would look well in its new home. To achieve the correct balance of form and "tumbly and jumbly," an architectural blueprint had to be made, insisted Sackville-West, which involved layout, bone-structure, and a semblance of order.

The classic English garden is all about the modest, unpretentious virtues of fritillaria, columbine, foxglove, lily of the valley, hazel, yew, holly, and daffodil. Or the understated colors—the way the fragile, pale pink beauty of the dog rose, stays in our hearts long after the gaudy pyrotechnics of Mediterranean blooms have been forgotten.

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Interior decorator, garden designer, and infamous London socialite Nicky Haslam reckons the unique English light is key. "It's that wonderful, navy blue shade that only English gardens have," he says. "The blue misty hills, the bright green before flowers come out at the beginning of May. That's what makes an English garden so beautiful." Haslam, sixty-one, who dresses like Sid Vicious and talks like Noël Coward, loves the way that the wild and unkempt gives way to the tidy and disciplined. He adores the charm of tortured dwarf apple trees and big, fat herbaceous borders, chock-full of sprawling plants.

Oh, and lawns. Haslam, like all major English garden fans, dearly loves a nice lawn, be it a lush, verdant, freshly mown meadow or a carefully manicured croquet green. "No one manicures a lawn quite like the English," says Haslam, matter-of-factly.

Of course, weather is an important factor in the way that this bewitching, bucolic muddle has developed. "The grass in Britain is better than any grass in the world," says Pearson. "We have a constantly wet climate so the grass stays wet and never stops growing." The wet has inspired us, too. Actor and writer Richard E. Grant once said that minimalism, as an interior design concept, would never work in England because the weather was too bad. Rigid minimalism works best in arid, sun-kissed climes, while ordered disarray is called for when it is damp and drizzly.

The same obtuse logic could be applied to English gardens, where the benign climate has encouraged us to concentrate on free-flowing flora and fauna, giving nature free-reign to do its watery worst. This may be a complete mystery to the rest of the world. Why on earth would a nation which prides itself on the world-famous "stiff upper lip" be so wantonly haphazard about its backyards? Well, perhaps it is because the country that gave the world Sir Edward Elgar also gave it the Sex Pistols.

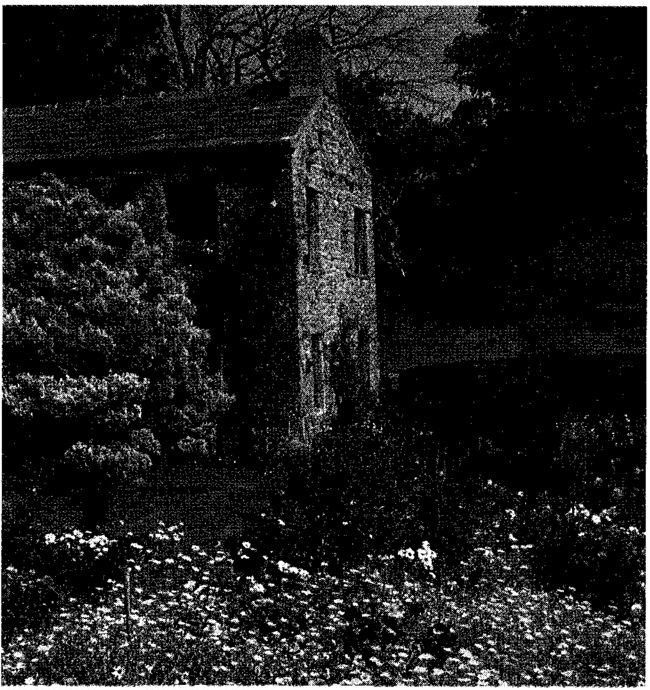
THE GREEN-THUMBED ROCK 'N' ROLLERS

Lancelot "Capability" Brown was the eighteenth-century anarchist responsible for many elements of what we now accept as the English country house garden. Brown wasn't particularly concerned with namby-pamby details like flowers and shrubs. He was much more into earth moving and river damming. He had tremendous ambition, confidence, and capability (hence the nickname), and was the first gardener brave enough to actually move trees, re-route rivers, and create lakes to give the impression of space.

To have a Capability Brown garden in the mid-eighteenth century was the height of fashion—a bit like having David Chipperfield or John Pawson design your London apartment for you now. Brown thought nothing of destroying formal gardens to make way for his naturalistic vision.

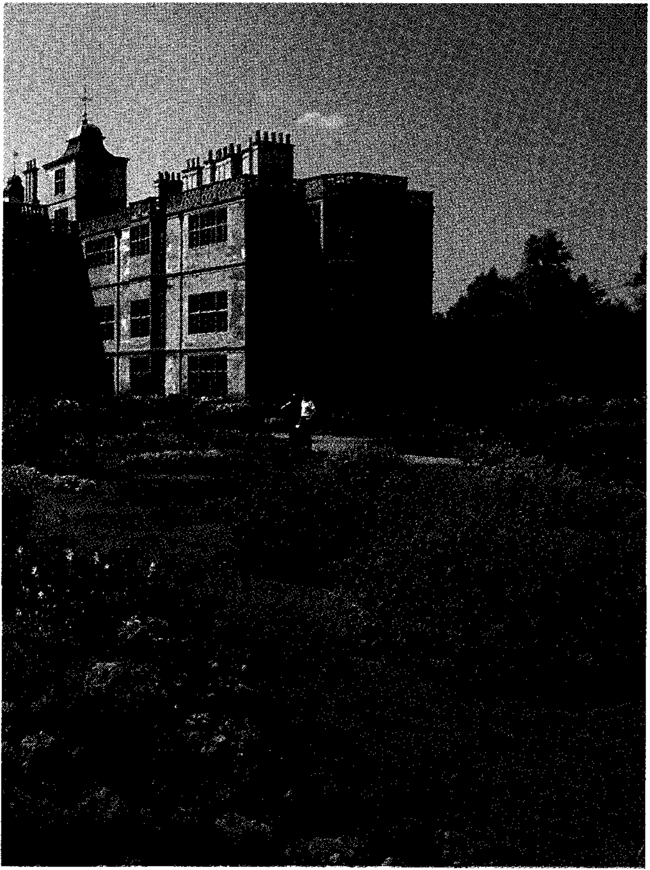
Before he died in 1783, Brown designed the grounds of more than one hundred and forty estates, the best of which can be seen at Blenheim Palace, Harewood House, Petworth House, Warwick Castle, Bowood, and Longleat in Wiltshire. But Capability Brown wasn't the only green-thumbed rock 'n' roller.

"Let people create beauty howsoever they please," said John Forbes Watson in his book "Flowers and Gardens" (1872). There was also William Robinson, author of the highly regarded "English Flower Garden," first published in 1883. Robinson hated topiary and statues, preferring modest banks of flowers to



courtesy of The British Tourist Authority

VILLAGE OF ASKRIGG, NORTH YORKSHIRE
This typical English cottage garden has a loose formality built upon a good "bone structure." But don't be deceived by its cultured wildness—everything is grown according to a plan.



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AUDLEY END, ESSEX
Eighteenth-century landscaper Lancelot "Capability" Brown designed the grounds of this Jacobean mansion, adorning the area with magnificent temples and monuments.

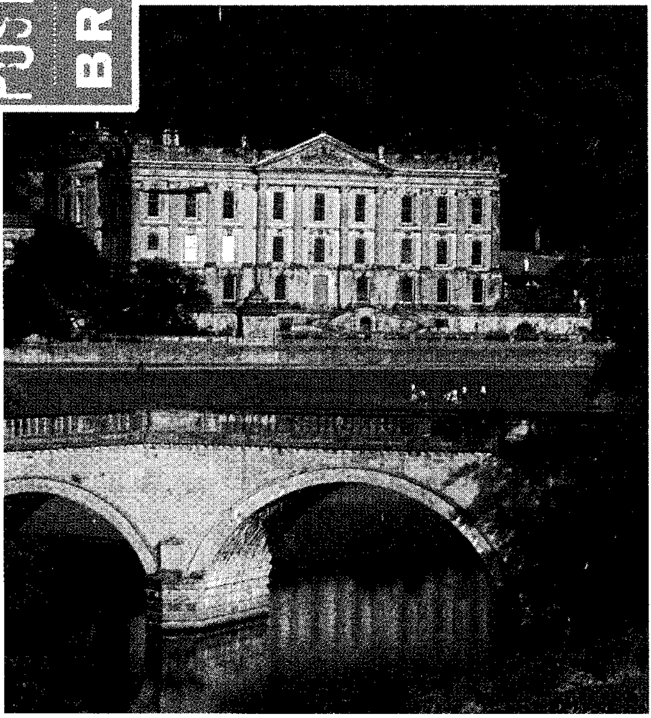
big show-offy displays. He is still much admired and frequently name-dropped by Dan Pearson and also by Christopher Lloyd, who owns and tends thoroughly delightful gardens at Great Dixter, Kent. Now that the English garden is fashionable again, Lloyd, who has been gardening for nearly fifty years, is enjoying a second wind as the guru of the contemporary English garden.

Indeed, those looking for a blast of sheer green and pleasant Englishness, could do much, much worse than to visit Great Dixter. Planned by Lloyd's parents, designed by Edwin Lutyens, and developed by Lloyd—who has also lived in the fifteenth-century house for more than forty-seven years—it is a delight. But if Great Dixter is not your cup of Earl Grey, Pearson recommends Hidcote, a Natural Trust garden where "formal space is used brilliantly with a series of undulating slopes, different exterior 'rooms' and contrivances. The proportion, space and 'bone structure' in that that garden is excellent," he says.

Haslam wants it to be known that he despises formal Elizabethan gardens. He is vitriolic about Tuscan pots, and despairs over the rigidity of French influence. But he adores "gardens where the grass comes right up to the back door and there are sheep running around the garden."

His favorite garden is his own at The Hunting Lodge in Avon. "It is quite small, the lawn square, and surrounded by hornbeams." Haslam's parcel of land isn't strictly speaking open to the public, but if he gets a polite phone request at his office he does allow the occasional visitor during the summer.

Bryan Ferry, vocalist for the recently reunited Roxy Music, has lived in West Sussex, near Arundel, for the past twenty-five



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CHATSWORTH, DERBYSHIRE

For the 1,100-acre park surrounding Chatsworth, Capability Brown planted hundreds of thousands of trees, widened the river, and had vast amounts of ground moved to improve the views.

SCOTTISH PARADISE

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CRATHES CASTLE, BANCHORY. This sixteenth-century castle boasts eight separate gardens as well as nature trails.

FINLAYSTONE, LANGBANK. Robert Burns once walked the grounds of this eight-hundred-year-old estate, long noted for its sweeping lawns and walled garden.

LINN BOTANIC GARDEN, COVE. Extensive water garden with formal ponds, fountains, and waterfalls, along with herbaceous borders and exotic trees surrounding a Victorian villa.

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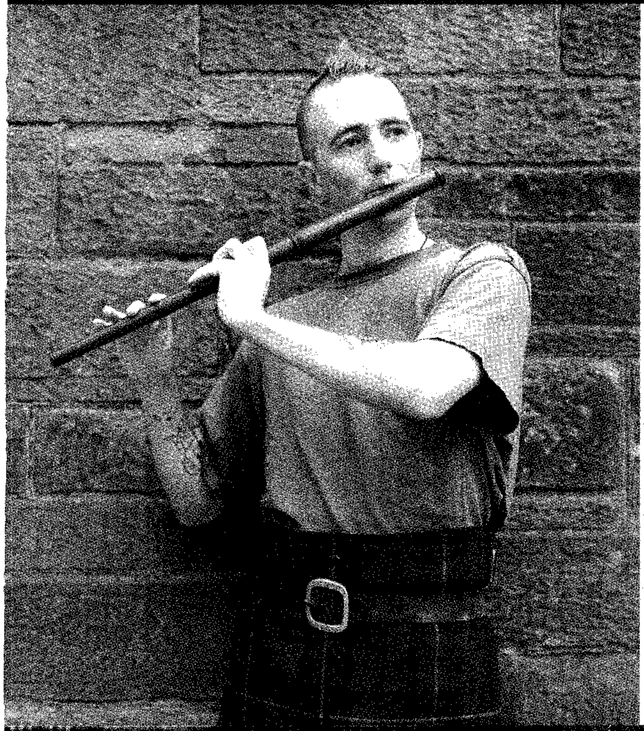

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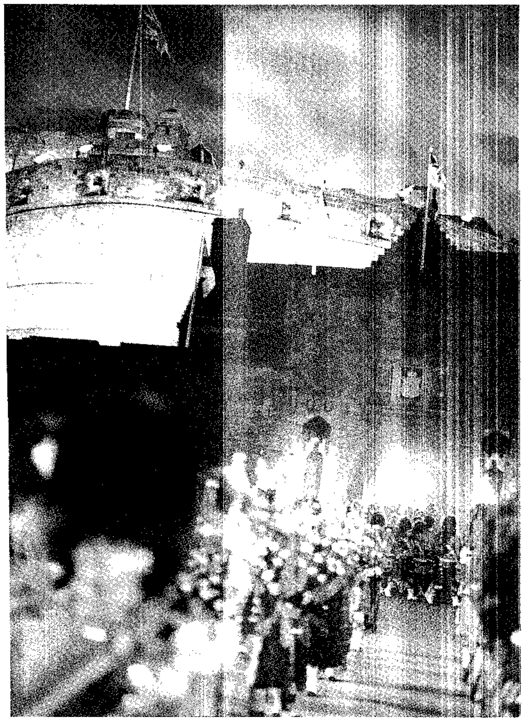

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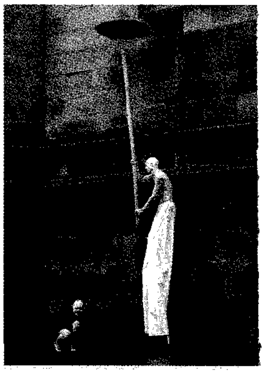

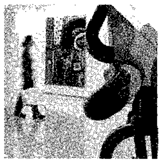

Culture thrives in our cities too. Take in the works of Raeburn, the Glasgow Boys, the Scottish Colourists and modern masterpieces at Glasgow's GOMA and Dundee Contemporary Arts. Festivals abound too, such as Glasgow's *Celtic Connections,* a major celebration of celtic music and song. The fantastic *Edinburgh International Festival* and *Fringe,* and Edinburgh's acclaimed *Military Tattoo,* draw acts and audiences from around the world. **www.culturalscotland.com**

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years. He bought the property not because he was enchanted by the house, but because he fell in love with the garden. Ferry was instantly enamored of the twelve acres of garden and flower beds, rare, the white wisteria, and the explosions of gunnera, "which look like prehistoric rhubarb." He also fell for the orchard, with its twenty different types of apples, the gazebo, the stream, and the little area conceived of as a "mini Scotland" by the garden's designer, Clough Williams Ellis.

Last year, Ferry even managed to incorporate his love of English gardens into his work schedule. When he was promoting "As Time Goes By," an album of standards, he eschewed the usual circuit of dreary town halls and university auditoriums for a tour of country houses, playing concerts at Petworth House (just down the road from his own West Sussex house), Castle Howard (better known to TV viewers as the setting for "Brideshead Revisited"), Blickling Hall in Norfolk, and Elton Hall near Peterborough. Pre-gig stress was relieved by taking a relaxing stroll around the gardens. "It was lovely," says Ferry, his mind clearly drifting off to some idyllic, misty, early evening walk. "Really lovely."

(Simon Mills writes regularly for British Vogue, *is a contributing editor to British* GQ, *and a columnist for* The London Evening Standard.*)*

BLOOMING BRITAIN

Napoleon Bonaparte may have famously referred to Britain as a "nation of shopkeepers," but he should have also mentioned its gardeners. Below is a selection of some of the more noteworthy wonderlands, ranging in size from tiny jewels to vast rolling estates.

CASTLE HOWARD, YORKSHIRE. This woodland garden is made up of ancient trees intermingled with some eight-hundred rhododendron species and hybrids. Adjoining rose gardens contain more than two thousand varieties.

CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN, LONDON. The UK's second oldest botanic garden is just off stylish Sloane Square and set on almost four acres, with an herb garden, a perfumery border, glasshouses, and a historical walk.

HODSOCK PRIORY, BLYTH, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE. Dating back to medieval times, five acres are bounded by a moat. Borders are planted with snowdrops, irises, and golden aconite. Also known for its resident wildlife—hedgehogs and butterflies.

HUTTON-IN-THE-FOREST, PENRITH, CUMBRIA. A medieval house with an eighteenth-century walled flower garden, terraces, a topiary, woodland walk, and a lake.

MYDDELTON HOUSE GARDENS, LONDON. Created by legendary gardener E. A. Bowles, this garden near Bulls Cross includes a tulip terrace, rock garden, two conservatories, and a carp lake. Don't miss the "Lunatic Asylum" (a collection of eccentric plants).

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Other helpful Web sites include **www.travelengland.org.uk** for general information, **www.travelbritain.org/gardens** on U.K. gardens, and **www.LondonTown.com** for travel information on London.

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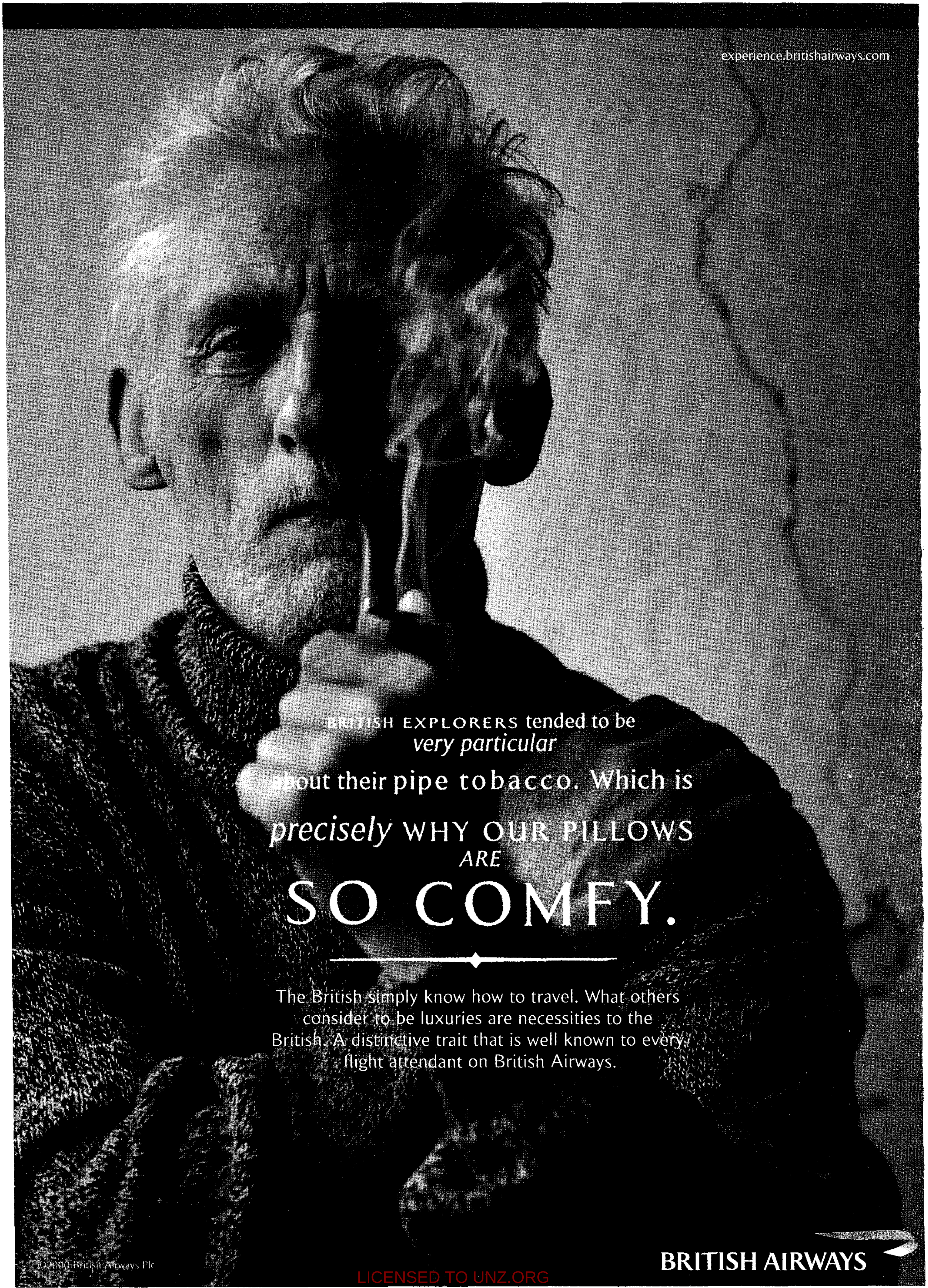
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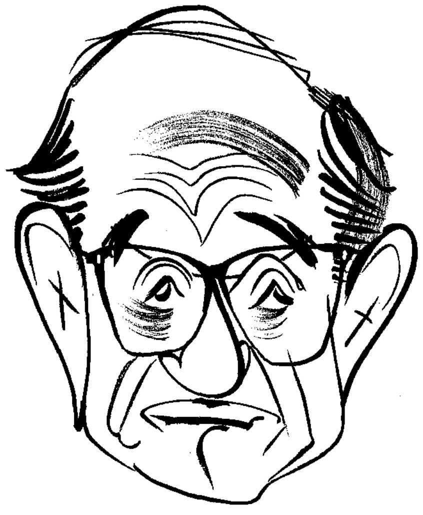
COMMENT
TAKING STOCK

It's just as well that Alan Greenspan enjoyed his seventy-fifth birthday a couple of weeks ago. The chairman of the Federal Reserve Board had not one party but two. His friends in Washington threw the first, at the Chevy Chase Country Club, where, on occasion, Greenspan hacks it around the rough. Vice-President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, and World Bank President James Wolfensohn all raised a glass. The second party, a few days later, was in New York, in a private room at Le Cirque. Pete Peterson, a Wall Street investment banker, and Joan Ganz Cooney, the creator of "Sesame Street," were the hosts. Barbara Walters brought a video that spoofed Nancy Reagan's astrologer using a Ouija board to advise the guest of honor whether he should raise or lower interest rates. Peterson presented Greenspan with an eight-foot-long golf club to help him improve his game.

The merriment stopped last Tuesday, when Greenspan cut interest rates by half a percentage point, and found himself roundly jeered by Wall Street and the press. "The Fed's actions thus far do not appear to be promoting financial conditions conducive to solid growth," Robert V. DiClemente, an economist at Salomon Smith Barney, complained. The cut was "almost certainly too weak to do the job," Paul Krugman, the *Times'* economics columnist, agreed. By the time the markets closed on Wednesday, the Dow had tumbled another five hundred points, sinking below 9,500 for the first time in two years. As for the Nasdaq, the less said the better. It fell another hundred and twenty points, and is now down sixty per cent from its peak last year.

One of the stocks hit hardest during the recent sell-off is a company that was a star performer in the great bull market: Greenspan.com. In the early nineties, it was considered very much an "old economy" stock: dull but reliable. The product it sold—low inflation and steady economic growth—didn't set hearts racing, but it had a loyal following on Wall Street. Greenspan.com rarely appeared in the headlines, but the commentary in the business section was generally favorable. A few years ago, after it discovered the wonders of high technology, Greenspan.com struck out in a radical new direction. After "re-engineering" its product line, it offered customers the low inflation they were used to, with the added features of rapid economic growth and stock-price charts that looked like moon launches. How Greenspan.com had managed to combine these attributes was something of a mystery, but the firm's boosters said it had something to do with the Internet, and most people were content to leave it at that. Before long, Greenspan.com's founder and C.E.O. was on the front pages of the newspapers and the covers of the glossy magazines. The articles offered similar analyses, but they did raise an occasional point of contention, such as whether the cover boy's intellect and judgment were best compared to Newton's, Einstein's, or Solomon's.


Alan Greenspan

Sad to say, a lot of this adulation now looks about as solidly grounded as the former stock-market valuations of Yahoo!, Amazon.com, and Cisco Systems. Its recipient is learning a harsh but old lesson: being a central-bank chairman is a pretty easy job in good times and an almost impossible job in bad times. Back in the late nineteen-twenties, when the American economy was performing much as it would seventy years later, the men who ran the Fed were hailed as geniuses. Since the founding of the central

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

bank in 1913, it was pointed out, there had been no lasting recessions, and, thanks to the new "science" of monetary policy, there need be none in the future. This argument wasn't heard much after October of 1929, but it made a comeback in the late nineties. Even now it pops up in the often heard claim that the economy will recover strongly in the second half of this year. The Fed has cut interest rates three times since the beginning of the year, the argument goes, so there is bound to be a revival in confidence and spending.

Perhaps. Economics is a probabilistic science, and there is still a chance that the economy will pick itself up off the floor; but the odds are increasingly stacked in favor of a long and deep recession. The basic problem is that during the "Greenspan boom" the Fed allowed the revelry to continue for far too long. As a result, many firms have too much production capacity, many consumers have too much debt, and the country as a whole is beholden to foreign lenders. While the stock market was soaring and people were hitting the malls to spend their newfound wealth, these problems could be ignored. The rising stock market produced a self-reinforcing cycle of prosperity. Now that many stocks are following the path of an air-to-ground missile, both businesses and consumers are cutting back, and foreigners are reassessing their American investments. This could easily lead to a self-reinforcing "Greenspan bust." If it does, the Fed chairman's seventy-sixth birthday celebration won't be so jolly. And Greenspan.com will be reduced to a penny stock.

—*John Cassidy*

DEPT. OF SANITATION
THE AUTEUR OF TRASH

When it comes to filming garbage, Mike Barbarotto is used to being in complete control. As the audiovisual manager of New York's Sanitation Department, Barbarotto, a slim, bespectacled fifty-seven-year-old, has written, directed, and produced about three dozen films over the course of twenty-three years. On the set in the department's city-size Central Repair Shop, in Maspeth, Queens—shooting, say, "Snow Plow: A Training Video" or a primer on illegal dumping—Barbarotto has been known to sit in a director's chair and bark orders through a megaphone while wearing riding boots. "He's sort of our Fellini," a Sanitation Department colleague said recently.

Last Thursday, Barbarotto set out to document the final shipment of trash to the Fresh Kills landfill, the world-famous three-thousand-acre Staten Island garbage dump, which will be closed officially on July 4th. He needed footage of the voyage, from Queens to Fresh Kills, of the last trash barge. On this occasion, however, he would not have complete control. The barge was on a schedule, and he'd have to adjust to it. "Today, it's got nothing to do with me," Barbarotto said as he was gathering his gear at 5 A.M. "It's all being run downtown at headquarters. So we'll see."

With the help of his assistant, Gerard Morency, a Haitian-born part-time wedding photographer, Barbarotto loaded up the audiovisual van. Their escort, a Sanitation Department policeman in a squad car, arrived, and they were off.

The barge was docked in College Point, Queens, at a Sanitation pier on the East River. Barbarotto parked the van on the pier and said, "O.K., I need the money shot." There was a tugboat for the trash barge and a tugboat for the press, and Barbarotto managed to commandeer a tug of his own. As it pulled out, he climbed to the boat's bridge and started giving directions to the captain, who stared calmly back at him. "I'll do my dangedest," the captain said.

The last barge—heaped with steaming trash and decorated with a banner that read "LAST GARBAGE BARGE TO FRESH KILLS"—pulled out, to applause from the shore, and Barbarotto began filming. Things quickly went wrong. The tug was not where Barbarotto wanted it. "Mike, they're going!" Gerard shouted.

"I know! I know!" Barbarotto yelled. He panned the barge and the Queens shore, then shouted to the tug's first mate to tell the captain to hurry the boat in to the pier. "I got a shot," Barbarotto said. "But it wasn't the shot I envisioned." Everyone seemed to understand that Barbarotto was upset. No one spoke. Finally, Barbarotto said, "O.K., now we gotta hurry. We're not gonna have time to get any other shots. The barge is moving too fast." They jumped back into the van, ready to race the barge to the next location: a pier at the South Street Seaport.

Traffic on the Grand Central Parkway was bumper to bumper, so Barbarotto and the Sanitation cop both switched on their sirens and emergency dome lights. The convoy veered from lane to lane. "Garbage emergency!" Barbarotto shouted. Just after crossing the Triborough Bridge, the Sanitation cop drove past the Manhattan exit. (He explained later that he had been thinking he was on his way to see his girlfriend, who lives in the Bronx.) Barbarotto honked, waved, and shouted until the cop stopped, fifty yards past the exit. With sirens blaring, both car and van raced backward against the flow of traffic. Gerard covered his eyes.

Soon they were speeding down the F.D.R. Drive. It had started to pour. No one could see the barge. "How much time, Gerard?" Barbarotto asked.

"I'm afraid to say, Mike," Gerard said.

They set up at the seaport, even though Barbarotto was convinced they'd missed the barge. "What I'm concerned about now is just getting it in the can for posterity," Barbarotto said.

"Mike, they're coming!" Gerard shouted.

It was about 9 A.M. The trash, still steaming, floated triumphantly under the Manhattan Bridge, under the Brooklyn Bridge, and then past the seaport. Barbarotto got a beautiful shot.

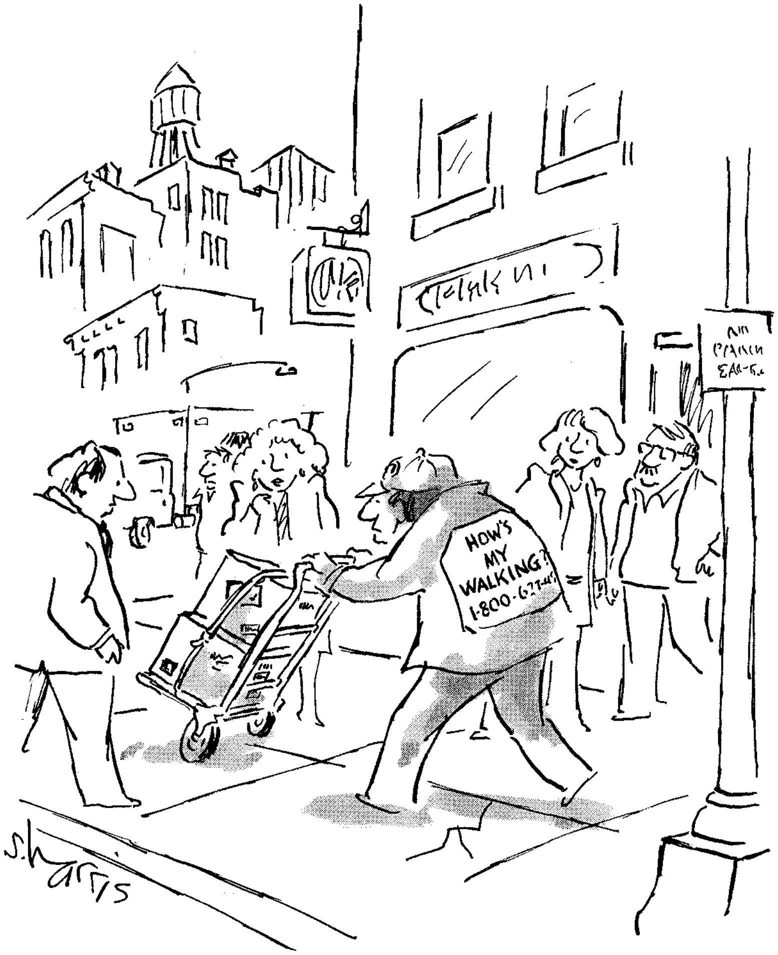
It took an hour to drive to Fresh Kills. Water was leaking through the van's roof. Barbarotto got out and wandered along the Styrofoam-covered edges of the landfill, looking for a place to shoot the arrival. "It would have been historic without the rain," he said. Eventually, he decided to commandeer another boat, a trash skimmer, a craft designed to pick up garbage that falls off the barges. Barbarotto's crew crowded onto the skimmer's bridge, which gave them a fine view of the reed-covered garbage hills. You could see the barge coming. Over the skimmer's radio, a Sanitation dispatcher sang "Memories . . ." Barbarotto went out onto the deck, where

Gerard held a Weather Channel umbrella over him as he filmed the barge's final approach.

Having got the last shot of the last barge, the crew returned to the van, their clothes soaked through. "It's getting harder every day," Gerard said.

"And it's gonna get harder," Barbarotto said. "People think this is an easy job, sitting around watching TV all day! But look at that rain leaking through the roof. Look at this! Soaking wet, freezing! This ain't easy."

—Robert Sullivan



TALLAHASSEE POSTCARD
RETURN TO HANGING CHAD

Not long ago, millions of people hung on their every word, but the other night fewer than a hundred souls turned out at Tallahassee's Silver Slipper steak house to hear some of the luminaries from the great recount of 2000 reminisce about those suddenly far-off days. The satellite trucks are gone, and from time to time some hotel rooms go begging, but, in Florida's capital, memories of the thirty-six-day siege remain fresh.

The gathering resembled nothing so much as a class reunion, right down to the slightly tatty surroundings and the open bar. (This being north Florida, there was also a big tray of sweet tea.) People milled around for a while, then settled down at a pair of long tables. The most famous names from the recount battle—Boies, Olson, Tribe, et al.—were all out-of-towners, but it was Tallahassee lawyers who filed the briefs, prepared the appendices, and worried about the deadlines. And so the evening began with some good-natured grumbling about the glamour gap between the locals and the imports. It was like any reunion, where the safest route for everyone present was to make fun of those who were not—in this case, the heavily credentialled Yankee invaders.

Up on the dais, a panel of ten—eight lawyers and two judges—took turns answering questions about the recount. "I have to say I learned that people who went to Harvard or Yale and clerked on the United States Supreme Court can be as smart as people who attended Florida State University," John Newton, a bow-tied pixie who represented Gore during the recount battle, said.

"We had this big screen in one office that projected a huge version of whatever these guys were typing," said Ken Sukhia, a member of the Bush team, referring to the lawyers who'd come from up North. "And I was kind of hoping it would be like 'The Shining'—'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' over and over again. But these guys produced the most brilliant legalese I'd ever seen." E. C. Deeno Kitchen, another Gore lawyer (whose name only sounds like a pseudonym), recalled an exchange he'd had with David Boies. "I said, 'David, I'm a little nervous about something. I don't know if R. J. Reynolds knows that I'm representing the Vice-President.' And David said, 'Don't worry. I represent Philip Morris.' "

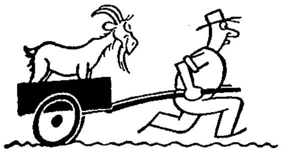
The two judges, Terry Lewis and Sanders Sauls, also needled an absent target: the national press corps. Judge Lewis, who handled the Gore campaign's challenge to Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris's certification of the election, recalled the coverage of his case with some fondness. "I got a big kick out of it," he said. "I watched it every chance I got." He had been particularly entertained by what the on-air analysts had to say about his conduct in court. "It was always interesting to find out what I really meant," he noted dryly. Judge Sauls, whose cornpone aphorisms drew wide notice when he presided over Gore's suit contesting the Florida election results, was up next. He seemed to have viewed the outsiders with disdain. "I didn't pay any attention to them—as usual," Sauls said, half gruffly. "To the dismay of many, the case didn't change me at all."

Dessert (layer cake) arrived at the same time as the main course (beefsteak or halibut), and after the plates were cleared the room turned quiet as the participants engaged in some serious introspection. There was none of the usual competition over who had the biggest car or the best-looking spouse; everyone already knew who the winners and losers were. "I remember there was this big guy with suspenders in one of the offices, Tim Flanigan, and all I knew about him was that he had a lot of kids," Sukhia, the Bush lawyer, said. "Now I turn around and the guy is deputy White House counsel."

No such luck for the Democrats, of course, and it wasn't until the end of the evening that it became clear that they were still heartbroken and outraged. Mark Herron, a beefy guy who had hardly spoken, said quietly, "I had to leave my firm because I wouldn't stop working for Gore." Then, with the kind of earnest solemnity that you don't often hear at reunions, he added, "I still have difficulty every night with the ten-o'clock hour. That was when the networks took Florida out of the Gore column—and that was also the time the U.S. Supreme Court decided the election."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

ODD JOBS
THE CENSUS BUREAU'S IDEA OF UPWARD MOBILITY



Every writer I know has at one time dreamed of finding a different line of work—less solitary and solipsistic, more remunerative or athletic, something of greater immediate utility to the human race. I would have liked to be a brain surgeon.

Last week, I was inspired to rethink my alternative-career plans. My husband had downloaded the 2000 census data to our home computer, including lists of the thirty-one thousand professions open to census respondents. One table orders them alphabetically; another groups them into twenty-three über-categories, which are ranked according to somewhat inscrutable Darwinian criteria: "skill-level," suggested one census official, or "roughly descending socioeconomic status," according to an introduction to an older job index, or perhaps just muscle-to-fat ratio. Extrapolating somewhat recklessly, I admit, from macro to micro, from ontology through ontogeny to taxonomy via toxicology (it was happy hour), I reached the following conclusions about our new social order.

Presidents and board chairmen (but not chairpeople) are, predictably, top dogs, but so are liquor commissioners. Oil-lease operators and zoo directors share second place. Fashion stylists, along with liquidators, rate highly, at 5. Bank cashiers and bank presidents fraternize bolshevistically at 12. Farmwives, sharecroppers, and stallion keepers hover around 20, with rat and muck farmers, ahead of space physicists (170), animal and people bounty hunters (611 and 382, respectively), impregnators (881), soubrettes (270), blood donors (465), wort extractors (896), boarding-house keepers (34), and Web developers (111), though they may be in for a downgrade next time around; and vastly ahead of test pilots (903), blow-off workers (961), milkmen (913), goat drivers (920), and the undervalued zanjero (an assessor of water rights in the Southwest), who, at 975, is close to the bottom.

It was refreshing to think that, in someone's estimation, welfare mothers (460) rank above yacht masters (931), and that cancer researchers (165) have more prestige than tax lawyers (210)—though not, alas, more than undertakers (32). Stripteasers and bull fiddlers move and shake at 274 and 275, respectively, alongside professional athletes (272), clowns and cowboys (276), and journalists (281). Tonsorial artists are a cut above hairdressers (450 to 451), while medical doctors (in the age of H.M.O.s) rank just 306—well behind *mohels*, at 204, and faith healers, at 206, but marginally ahead of naprapaths, at 326.

Skull grinder

House wreckers (22) and casino managers (33) are highly prized members of society, at least by census officials. No one confessed to being a home wrecker, although, apparently, various respondents did admit to practicing the métiers of axeman, bootlegger, gang leader, knockdown man, roughneck, roustabout, rabbit fancier, roving hand, slasher, skull grinder, sponger, and spooner. An unspecified number also carry out the work of baggage smasher (453). But we knew that.

It should come as no surprise that pollsters (181) rank higher than politicians (202) and political reporters (281), or that literary agents, at 50—a nose ahead of horse traders, at 51—outrank authors. However, anyone who has ever tried to put together a barbecue grill by flashlight on a buggy summer night will question the assignment of assembly-instructions writers to the top of the scribe hierarchy (284), while biographers and novelists (socioeconomically indistinguishable) must content themselves with a 285. I tarried in the book section, impressed that there was so much to do besides write: book canvasser, cleaner, coverer, cutter, finisher, jogger, mender, packer, and sewer. But I also felt an instinctive professional kinship with those who serve the public in certain other guises—as, for example, borers, bucket chuckers, carnies, impersonators, morale officers, printer's devils, puppet masters, riddlers, smoothers, smutters, snipers, snubbers, solution-makers, sourers, and perhaps also bone pullers, pickers, and crushers.

So many jobs, so little time! Briskly scrolling through the populous categories of assemblers, apprentices, assistants, officers, repairers, salespeople, and teachers, I stopped to wonder about the workday of an aging room hand, joy loader, legman, pond monkey, rabbler, rink rat, riprap man, anti-squeak worker, bad-work gatherer, skoog operator, size changer, sister superior, snake charmer, and zoogler.

I found no listing for brain surgeon as such, though there is one for brainer (781). Still, it comforted me to think that, no matter how tough times get, I can always apply—confident of my fitness—for work as a wrong-address clerk.

—*Judith Thurman*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

STARTUP GUY 2001: A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE

The greatest orgy in the history of investment has come to an end. Gone are the days when a pair of flat-front khakis and some high-flown rhetoric about reinventing the gelato industry could get you a hundred million dollars in venture capital and a cover in the trades. Venture capitalists have become misers. Institutional investors have become cowards. And hordes of dot-commers have become unemployed. Still, in the midst of the carnage, people are starting new businesses in Silicon Valley. Some are even getting funding. It's just that the game has changed. The entrepreneur has been reëngineered, repurposed, and repositioned to suit this new, skeptical age. Bill Nguyen, for example, the thirty-year-old founder of a startup called Seven, has raised thirty-four million dollars in venture capital, signed up British Telecom as a customer, and brought in Microsoft as a partner. Nguyen is the new-model entrepreneur, frugal and unglamorous—the embodiment of how to behave if you're going to launch a business in the Valley in these hard times. "I cannot trim my conscience to fit this season's fashions," the lady said, but, of course, she never launched a startup. What comes naturally to that Seven guy may not come naturally to you. So, herewith, some trimming tips, modelled by Bill Nguyen.

Be a bluenose. Seven is the sixth startup that Nguyen has been involved in. Since he sold his last startup, Onebox.com, for eight hundred and fifty million dollars, he was certainly a beneficiary of the bubble. But he was scornful of it anyway. "There was no sense of responsibility," he says. "People weren't going into business to make products or solve problems. They just wanted to be rock stars." Nguyen didn't even go to the party celebrating the sale of his own company, because, he says, "I didn't think we deserved it." Goodbye, Prada. Hello, hair shirt.

Put a sock on it. Remember the Pets.com sock puppet? Nguyen keeps one on his desk. It's a reminder that a shoddy plan and a lack of discipline can sink a business in no time at all. (Pets.com went both public and bankrupt in less than a year.) The sock puppet also signals that you're not a dot-com-bubble guy, that you know that there is a right way (yours) and a wrong way (Pets.com's) to start a business. Nguyen even considered using the sock puppet as a threat to his employees; each month, he would award it to the worst among them, as a sort of booby prize.

Crack that whip. Nguyen is a slight guy with floppy black hair who laughs a lot and plays video games. He is also a hard-ass. One of the pleasanter aspects of the dot-com boom was the easygoing vibe that pervaded so many Bay Area loft offices, where big dogs padded around bearing casks of cappuccino. As a result, the work force went soft—and got greedy. Getting wildly rich, even if you were employee No. 1249 in the shipping department, began to seem not just plausible but necessary. In the new era, such expectations must be crushed. "I had this employee come in and start bitching about his life style, bitching about his stock options," Nguyen says. "So I fired him." Think Jack Welch, not Cat Stevens.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Go old-school. Silicon Valley has always been enthralled by the myth of the entrepreneur, but the true giants are the engineers, the garage-dwellers who build something real: Bill Hewlett and David Packard, Steve Wozniak, Marc Andreesen. During the dot-com mania, the engineers were superseded by the storytellers, the gurus of P.R. and marketing. But the stories have stopped working. Brad Silverberg, the man who helped Microsoft turn Windows into a $3.5-billion business, recently invested in Seven, which has developed a technology that lets you use your cell phone to access the information on your desktop or in your company's database. "You have to do hard stuff, technical stuff with real depth," Silverberg says. "We're going back to the old culture, which was engineering-driven, not gimmick-driven."

One word—wireless. Good ideas will find funding. But trendy good ideas find funding first. Right now, the trendiest good ideas are those having anything to do with cell phones, handheld devices, and the like. Phone companies around the world have invested billions of dollars in their wireless businesses and now they must find some way to get customers. That's where Seven comes in. Then again, by the time you read this the venture capitalists will probably have moved on to something else.

Be cheap. If the bubble's mantra was "Get big fast, whatever the cost," Nguyen's is "Spend small and slowly." You must do more than just use the word "profit." Try not to spend a lot of money in anticipation of something that may not occur. "The idea used to be 'Build it and they will come,' " Silverberg says. "Bill wants to turn that on its head: sell the product first, then build it."

Learn the difference between a pitch and a poem. The New Economy made American business more productive, more innovative, and more competitive. It did not, however, repeal the essential rules. The new entrepreneur does not say he wants to wipe the slate clean. "In the past couple of years, it was all about how new you could make yourself sound, and so you get questions like 'What's your business model?' " Nguyen says. "I just say my business model is the same business model that software companies have used for twenty-five years: I sell software, charge a license for it, and charge for support. That model makes sense. There's no reason to get rid of it. You don't have to reinvent the world every time you start a business." Of course, if you're not Bill Nguyen, you may have to reinvent yourself.

—*James Surowiecki*

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

IS THIS THE END OF RICO?

With "The Sopranos," the Mob genre is on the brink.

BY DAVID REMNICK

Ever since the early thirties, when Charles (Lucky) Luciano tamed the more anarchic impulses of the Mob, it has been an article of local faith that the greater metropolitan area is controlled by the Five Families. There are, as it happens, five and a half—the half being the DeCavalcantes of Union County, the only freestanding Mob family in New Jersey. Like their more powerful cousins across the river, the DeCavalcantes have in recent years suffered the indignities of federal investigation and the decimation of their numbers, so much so that they are experiencing the *agita* of existential dread. National franchisers now haul most of the trash; the pharaonic earners of Florham Park and Belleville are sweating over subpoenas; and, in the city, Little Italy dissolves into Chinatown while tourists stand on Mulberry Street summoning the memory of Crazy Joe Gallo's last supper. It's all on the fade. As the late columnist Murray Kempton once asked, "Where are the scungilli of yesteryear?"

The first blow to the DeCavalcantes came in the early sixties, when the F.B.I. planted a bug in the Kenilworth offices of the don, Simone Rizzo DeCavalcante, known as Sam the Plumber—plumbing supplies being one of his favored businesses. Already, in those wiretaps, one could sense that the Mob's influence was not quite what we believed it to be. "We got thirty-one or thirty-two soldiers," DeCavalcante is overheard saying. "Most of them are old people who ain't making much." In another tape, he sounds like a salaried municipal worker computing his pension: "If I can continue for two or three years, I will be able to show forty thousand or fifty thousand dollars legitimately and can walk out. Then my family situation will be resolved." Sam the Plumber's plans for his golden years were derailed only slightly—he spent 1971 through 1973 in prison. A few years after his release, he abandoned north Jersey for a condo in Fort Lauderdale. He died, at liberty, in 1997.

The DeCavalcante family is centered in Elizabeth, with branch offices at the Jersey shore, in Toms River, and in southern Brooklyn. In January of 1998, investigators started to undermine the DeCavalcantes as thoroughly as they had the Five Families. Federal agents wired an informer, who proved so cunning a rat that he almost won his stripes as a made man. Finally, the F.B.I. took the snitch out of action, spirited him away to the witness-protection program, and arrested fifty-eight men, among them one of the family's acting bosses, Vincent (Vinny Ocean) Palermo. Dozens of members will come to trial soon on charges of murder, extortion, loan-sharking, bookmaking, robbery, mail fraud, and trafficking in stolen property.

The wiretaps were both useful and sad. According to the *News*, the F.B.I. learned of the family's grandest designs, their plans to sell everything from stolen Viagra tablets on the Internet to an ersatz "original" screenplay for "The Wizard of Oz." One can hardly imagine the omnipotent Corleones planning, as the DeCavalcantes did, to forge "vintage" Superman comic books and sell them. "That would kill the comic industry," an associate named Sal Calciano says with evident satisfaction. "Nobody ever did it. Nobody ever [expletive] thought of it before."

Perhaps all that will be left of the DeCavalcante legacy is the plaintive tone of their wiretaps. Joseph (Joey O) Masella, Palermo's driver, seems typically forlorn, an emblematic mobster at the fin de siècle. The F.B.I. has served his grandmother with a subpoena. His wife has thrown his clothes onto the lawn. His kid needs a therapist; his girlfriend wants breast implants. He can

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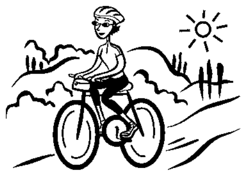

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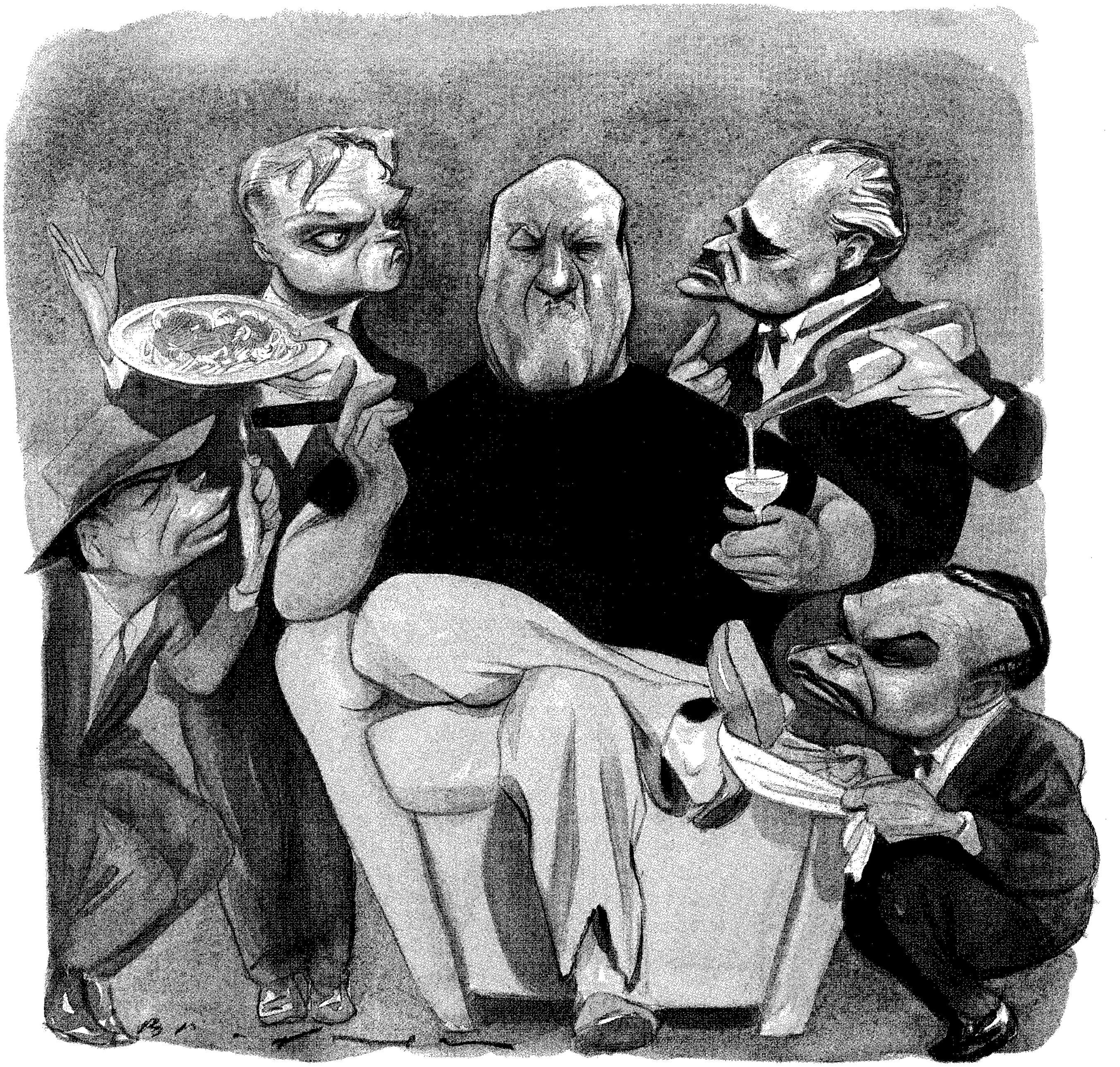
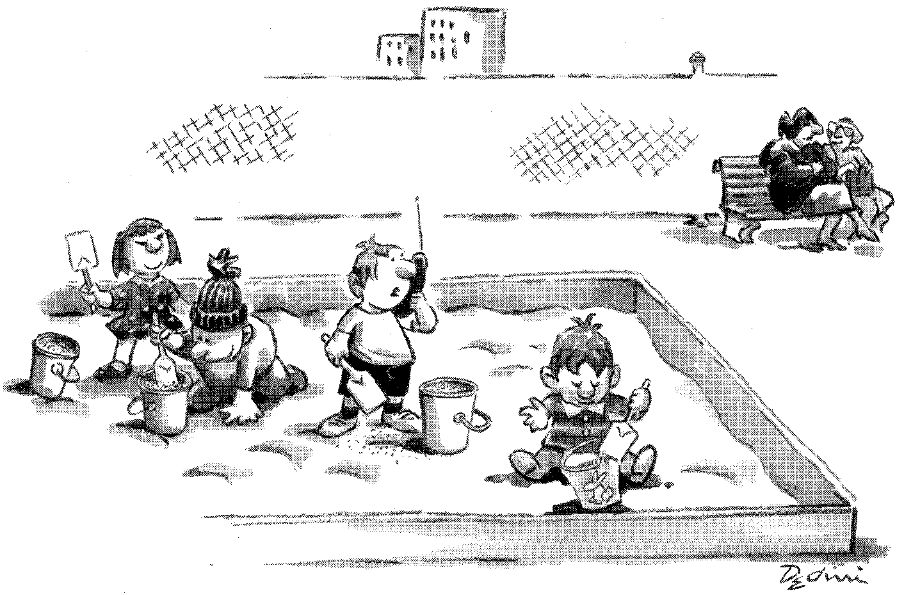
afford neither. Masella is in debt all around town. Fatherhood drives him mad. He calls his ex-wife and begs her to take the kids off his hands. "Come and get your daughters. I can't take it no more," he says. "You left me this responsibility. I'm fifty years old. I can't [expletive] breathe. I'm dyin' over here." His humiliation is complete. "I don't want it," Masella says. "The whole [expletive] life. Who the [expletive] wants it? I don't want it." But Masella can't get out. He owes a hundred thousand dollars to various gangsters, who are not likely to forgive him or his debt. In June, 1998, Palermo, by way of warning, kicks Masella in the groin and tells him he'd better get square. "You know, by rights, I gotta kill you," Palermo says. Not good. On October 10, 1998, Masella was found dead in a parking lot in Marine Park with bullet holes in his pancreas, stomach, spleen, and intestine. Palermo was charged with the hit.

A couple of months later, Home Box Office began broadcasting a new series about a New Jersey crime family, "The Sopranos." Their domain is Essex County, not Union—a critical difference. The show, a creation of a television writer and producer from north Jersey named David Chase, has none of the operatic moralism and ambition of "The Godfather" pictures but, rather, combines the *gavone* camaraderie of "GoodFellas," the free-associative comedy of "Portnoy's Complaint," and the kitchen-table agonies of "The Honeymooners." Tony Soprano, played sublimely by the Gleasonesque James Gandolfini, is paterfamilias to both his crew (Big Pussy, Silvio, Paulie Walnuts, et al.) and his extended suburban family. Like the late Joey O Masella, Tony Soprano is everywhere persecuted by circumstance and the dramatis personae of his life: his demonic mother, Livia, despises him; his uncle Junior betrays him; his sister, Janice, exploits him; his wife, Carmela, lectures him; his sullen children, Meadow and Anthony, Jr., ignore



The gangster as a transitional figure: Paul Muni, James Cagney, James Gandolfini, Marlon Brando, and Edward G. Robinson.



"Come pick me up. This is going nowhere."

him; and the F.B.I. surveils him. And, like Joey O, Tony is depressed. It's all too much. He has nightmares and panic attacks; he sees a therapist; he takes Prozac and Xanax.

The critics have swooned. Even the most expert commentators admire the show. On March 3, 1999, some DeCavalcante members, an enforcer named Joseph (Tin Ear) Sclafani and a capo named Anthony Rotondo, are overheard on the wiretaps remarking on the uncanny resemblance between this thing of ours and this thing of theirs. "Hey, what's this fucking thing, 'Sopranos'?" Tin Ear asks. "What the fuck are they? . . . Is that supposed to be us?"

Rotondo knows all. "What characters. Great acting." He adds, "Every show you watch, more and more you pick up somebody. One week it was Corky, one week it was, well, from the beginning it was Albert G."

Sclafani, however, feels ignored, a Jersey guy's anxiety. "I'm not even existing over there," he says.

The producers of "The Sopranos" shoot the exteriors in Lodi, North Caldwell, Verona, Newark. The interiors—the Soprano house, the office in the Bada Bing strip club, and the office of Dr. Melfi, Tony's therapist—are shot in Queens, at the old Silvercup bakery, which has been a television studio since 1983. I visited the set a few weeks ago, as Chase was filming the thirteenth and final episode of the season. Chase is fifty-five, a trim, wary, almost expressionless man with hooded eyes and the sardonic wit of one who seems utterly distrustful of his current success. He has spent his adult life working in television, all the while dreaming of making feature films. There is a vestigial core of self-loathing in him. "Television is crap, and I don't watch it," he told me. "I only watched it as a kid." At Stanford film school, Chase made a gangster movie, for twelve hundred dollars, called "The Rise and Fall of Bug Manousous," about a man who is fed up with life, escapes into a fantasy of being a twenties mobster, and then dies in his own fantasy.

"I thought that maybe one day I would get to smoke Gauloises and make little dark enigmatic pictures," Chase said. In the beginning, he worked on the crew of a few soft-core features, "pussycat-theatre stuff." Chase said he had a job on one film "with two legitimate actors, about a senator's daughter who meets a handsome guy at a ski lodge. They wanted to distribute it as a legitimate picture, but if it failed they would do some 'insertion footage.' "

Over the years, Chase has written nine feature scripts, none of which have been produced. There were some close calls with the likes of Ridley Scott and Michael Mann, but, he said, "I could never get anything going." Soon he was making money, quite a lot of money, working in television, including some decent shows like "The Rockford Files" and "Northern Exposure," and yet he complained all the while, to his wife, to his daughter, to his therapist. "I felt cowardly," he said. "The most important piece of career advice my wife gave me was, If it's fulfilling for you, do it. And I mostly have not followed that." Then he revamped a lingering idea: to portray a suburban American family and cloak the story in the details of an ancient genre—the gangster film. Fox, CBS, NBC, and ABC all turned down Chase's pilot for "The Sopranos." And a good thing, too: with commercial breaks and network censors, "The Sopranos" undoubtedly would have become castrati.

At HBO, Chase has nearly unlimited creative control and "The Sopranos" wins, by cable standards, unprecedented ratings. For all that, Chase is still dubious about television—"I always wanted to get out of the television business and would still like to"—but on the set he seemed to work in a warm zone of engagement and satisfaction. He sat behind the director, John Patterson, as Gandolfini and Lorraine Bracco, who plays Dr. Melfi, started working on a therapist's-office scene in which Tony despairs of his son and of his failures in school. Gandolfini appears in practically every scene and, as a result, often works shooting days that run fourteen, sixteen hours. Like certain athletes, he psychs himself into concentration through a weird verbal violence: a shout, a snort, a nasty, self-directed epithet. When he blows a scene, his reaction can be volcanic.

Bracco was as lighthearted as Gandolfini was fierce. This was her last scene of the season. It began with Tony expressing his concern for a friend of the family, Jackie Aprile, Jr.

"Twenty-two years old, living in a housing project. Can you imagine the shame for the family?" All the while, Gandolfini is twitching, scratching his earlobe, working out a crick in his neck, wincing, every gesture another betrayal of anxiety and dread.

"In the end," Tony says, "I failed

him." He shrugs, shrugs magnificently. "What the fuck you gonna do?" This is Tony's customary reaction to death, to disaster: his defense mechanism. "What the fuck you gonna do in this world today?"

And then Lorraine Bracco lets rip with a whoopee cushion that she sneaked onto the set. Gandolfini, it can be fairly said, loses his concentration.

"Next line!" he barks.

Again with the whoopee cushion.

"Jesus!"

Now Bracco and Gandolfini are laughing.

Chase leans over and whispers, "It's the last week of school."

Bracco has pulled such stunts before. Not long ago, in another therapy scene, she stuck hair extensions under her skirt, and, just as Gandolfini was delivering a line, she crossed her legs, a parody of Sharon Stone in "Basic Instinct."

"I don't think we've got anything here yet," John Patterson said.

Bracco could not stop laughing: "I can't help it. At least they're not the silent, stinky ones."

They settle down. Action!

"Twenty-two years old. Living in a housing project. Can you . . . Fuck!"

Gandolfini gets out of his chair and walks to the office's antechamber. He takes a long sip of Coke and makes a call on his cell phone. He hangs up and sighs hugely. "It's like pulling fucking teeth!" he barks. Gandolfini's Jersey accent (he's from middle-class Park Ridge, in Bergen County) is softer than Tony's, but it is not entirely clear from the sound of his voice who is talking. "Fuckin' teeth!" Then he goes back inside and tries again. And screws it up again. "It's fucking unbelievable. I can't say anything!" He goes out, and says, "I don't know what I'm fucking talking about."

Finally, Gandolfini returns to the analysand's chair and nails the scene. Time for lunch. It is five o'clock in the afternoon.

David Chase grew up on Mob movies, and even with a considerable awareness of Mob reality. He watched "The Untouchables" on Thursday nights and "The Public Enemy" on Million Dollar Movie. His family, which changed its name from DeCesare to Chase, was middle class. His father had a hardware store, and his mother worked for the telephone company. In school, he knew the son of a mobster, and he read transporting crime stories in the now defunct Newark *Evening News* about the Boiardo family, a Genovese crew working in Essex County. And yet the most powerful autobiographical presence in "The Sopranos" derives not from the Mob but from family. Tony's mother, Livia (the name of Tiberius's harridan mother in "I, Claudius"), is modelled on Chase's own, he told me, "though I should point out that she never tried to have me killed." Nancy Marchand, who died last year, played the role so chillingly that, with the mere wave of her hand, sons across the nation, Italian or otherwise, could feel the zing of guilt along their spines. "My mother was so downbeat, so relentlessly pessimistic—and that, in Livia, all comes from her," Chase said. "That way of waving her hand in disgust, that comes from her, too. And all those lines: 'I wish the Lord would take me now'; 'I won't talk to anyone on the phone after dark.'

"I used to tell people stories about talking to my mother, and I got endless laughs with the shocking things she said—how she made a mandate of 'I have to speak my mind' and 'Do you think you're going to change me now?' and 'I'm no phony,' all under the banner of honesty. I remember she told me, in front of my wife, 'You'll get bored with her.' We're married thirty-three years. . . . I felt sometimes that she was like a performance artist, and her act was her level of pessimism about everything."

In "The Sopranos," the Mafia life is not so much the central subject as it is the intensifying agent. The conventions of the Mob heighten the conventions and contradictions of a modern family. The violence, which is horrific but rare, undermines everyone's ambition to be normal. Livia does not merely disapprove of her son. She tries to get him whacked. Tony tries to help his friend Artie Bucco, so he burns down his restaurant. Carmela is full of churchly moral posturing ("What's different between you and me is you're going to Hell when you die!"), but she happily spends Tony's blood money, and, with his skill for threat, she shakes down a woman to write a college recommendation for her daughter, Meadow. ("I want you to write that letter," she says evenly.) And at Meadow's school, Verbum Dei, the soccer coach turns out to be a child molester. The great surprise is that Tony, blissed out on Vicodin and booze, doesn't have Coach Hauser killed. From therapy, he has learned proportion.

An episode of "The Sopranos" typically has a primary and a secondary plot, with thirteen or so scenes, or "beats," each; there is a tertiary plot, with five or six beats; and there are, possibly, one or two additional mini-plots, with just a couple of beats. In one of the shapeliest of Chase's episodes, "College," from the first season, Tony takes Meadow on a trip to look at schools in Maine. This is a signal event for a parent and child of the upper-middle classes, a period of enforced intimacy, just as the child is about to leave home forever. It is a time for truthtelling. For the Sopranos, everything is somehow more so. In the car, Meadow asks her father, "Are you in the Mafia?" Tony confesses, up to a point, but protests that if he wasn't doing what he was doing he'd be selling patio furniture on Route 22. In Maine, Tony encounters a former rival who was in the witness-protection program, and, while Meadow is interviewing at Colby, he garrotes the rat with an electrical cord. Afterward, Meadow seems to know what's happened. ("Your hand is bleeding!") Meanwhile, at home in Jersey, Carmela, played with deadpan brilliance by Edie Falco, feeds baked ziti and red wine to the parish priest, Father Phil—and they *almost* have a one-night stand as they watch the repressed lovers in "The Remains of the Day" on DVD. This season, the parental theme has got even more pronounced as Anthony, Jr., descends into the murk of adolescence and Meadow, now a freshman at Columbia, dates a half Jewish, half African-American young man, whom Tony refers to, alternately, as "Sambo" and "Buckwheat." The Soprano kids are not, as kids are elsewhere on television, funny, triumphant, or powerful; they are grotesquely, realistically confused.

A few days after shooting ended, I met Chase for coffee. We talked about a particularly good scene in the season opener in which Anthony, Jr., is trying to figure out "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." Meadow, with a few weeks of Columbia behind her, helps out with all the critical self-possession of Northrop Frye. She tries to get him to see that the whiteness, the snow, in Robert Frost's scheme is symbolic of death. Anthony, Jr., cries out, "But I thought *black* meant death!" In "The Sopranos," even homework is ominous.

"Instead of doing 'Eight Is Enough' or something, we set it in a situation of life and death," Chase said. "The Mob provides an essential set of contradictions in Tony Soprano's character. It also gives you the possibility of danger and then hours of non-danger. And it gives you a world that is something allegedly private and secret.

"I thought the Mob was expired as a movie form before we ever started," Chase went on. "I wouldn't care if this were the last Mob movie. I have nothing invested in Mob movies."

Does "The Sopranos," with all its postmodern self-awareness, with all its evidence of decline, signal the end of the Mafia movie? Will the Mob movie go the way of the Western, revived rarely and only then as something nostalgic ("Unforgiven"), sensational ("The Wild Bunch"), or comic ("Blazing Saddles")? It is remarkable to think now how such a rich movie genre came out of such a small, violent, and hermetic world. There were a few silent Mob pictures of distinction—D. W. Griffith's 1912 short "The Musketeers of Pig Alley," Raoul Walsh's "The Regeneration" (1915), and Josef von Sternberg's "Underworld" (1927)—but the first golden age was ushered in by two events: the advent of sound, in 1927, which gave us the jolt of gunfire and the bite of the gangsters' slang and wit, and the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, in 1929, which made Al Capone a national media figure. Three films released between 1931 and 1932—Mervyn LeRoy's "Little Caesar," William Wellman's "Public Enemy," and Howard Hawks's "Scarface"—set the standard. Both David Chase and Tony Soprano adore them and the theme they established. As Robert Warshow pointed out in his 1948 essay "The Gangster as Tragic Hero," the appeal of these pictures, beyond their visceral excitement and their opportunity for escapism, resides in "that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects 'Americanism' itself," the comfort and conformity, the sunny optimism and unbounded opportunity. The gangster in these movies is a man whose response to harsh circumstance is brutal and ultimately doomed. He is possessed of perverse ambition and perverse nobility. With our ids, we enjoy his murderous ascent, we delight in his malapropisms and limitless appetites, and with our superegos we are satisfied by his inevitable fall, we feel a sense of superiority and relief.

The enjoyment of gangster pictures is a guilty pleasure, and, in the early thirties, Hollywood could not distribute these movies without at least making a show of contrition. Both "The Public Enemy" and "Little Caesar" begin with warning labels in the guise of sermons. After seeing the name James Cagney and the rest of the cast list for Wellman's picture, we read the message "It is the ambition of the authors of 'The Public Enemy' to honestly depict an environment that exists today in a certain strata of American life, rather than glorify the hoodlum or the criminal." "Little Caesar" begins with a quotation from the Book of Matthew printed on faux parchment: ". . . for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

In both pictures, the hero (or anti-hero, as he would be called later on) rises from small-time criminal to singular status in the big city and is then pursued and killed. This is, more or less, the arc of all Mob pictures: the brutal man who believes himself invulnerable and then ends up dead in the gutter. And that is the moment when Edward G. Robinson, as Enrico Bandello—clearly a Capone figure—is dying and breathes the immortal line "Mother of Mercy! Is this the end of Rico?"

Howard Hawks, in trying to make "Scarface," suffered worse than Well-

"I shouldn't, but I'm going to have the garbage."

man and LeRoy. Hawks and his main screenwriter, Ben Hecht, wanted to make a picture that somehow combined Al Capone and the Borgias. But the Hays Office, headed by the former Republican Party chairman Will Hays and his deputy, Colonel Jason Joy, would not give a movie the production seal of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America without a thorough review. Hays and Joy scoured scripts for any traces of amorality. Joy's reading of the script of "Scarface" was particularly damning and left Hawks despondent. For weeks, it seemed that there would be no movie at all, according to Todd McCarthy's biography of Hawks. Hays, for example, complained that Scarface's mother was a "grasping virago, distinctly an Italian criminal type mother"; he insisted that the mother "present to the son a dialogue telling him what the Italian race has done for posterity and that he, Scarface, is bringing odium and shame upon his entire race." Most galling of all to Hawks, the Hays Office threatened to withhold the production seal unless he added a finale scene with a judge condemning Scarface on the gallows. "You've commercialized murder to satisfy your personal greed for power," the judge intones. "You've killed innocent women and children with brutal indifference. You are ruthless, immoral, and vicious. There is no place in this country for your type." Hawks and his producer, Howard Hughes, battled with Hays and Joy for nearly a year, but there was no getting around most of these compromises.

In 1933, with the end of Prohibition, the image of the mobster as a misbegotten freedom fighter became obsolete; in 1934, with the formalization of the Hays Code, it became untenable. In "Dead End" and "Angels with Dirty Faces," the gangster became an object of sociological study and audience pity; in comedies like "The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse" and "Ball of Fire," he became the butt of the joke; and in Raoul Walsh's "The Roaring Twenties," made in 1939, the mobster became a figure of nostalgia.

Crime films headed off in two main directions: treating the psychopathic lone criminal (Walsh's "White Heat," Henry Hathaway's "Kiss of Death") or highlighting the private detective. From John Huston's "The Maltese Falcon" to Howard Hawks's "The Big Sleep" and Edward Dmytryk's "Murder My Sweet," Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe and their like were freelance survivalists in the crepuscular urban jungle. They were quick-witted and not averse to violence, and their instinct for survival was inhibited by an internal code of ethics that pushed them, if only grudgingly, to the side of order.

The first important Mafia film after "Scarface" was "On the Waterfront" (1954), in which the Mob appears in its new, postwar guise as a monkey wrench in the machinery of liberal capitalism. As the has-been fighter, Marlon Brando sacrifices himself in a last (and seemingly futile) stand against Lee J. Cobb and the men who control New York Harbor.

The big-time Mafia, the Mafia of great American Romans running New York, is the subject of Francis Ford Coppola's "The Godfather" (1972). Nearly thirty years later, "The Godfather" is still terrifying and remains, in many ways, the best of all gangster films—we are not likely to forget the solemn one-liners, the oaths, the assassinations of Luca Brasi and Sonny Corleone, or the Don's sunlit death in his tomato garden—but, like the many operas it recalls, the film is generously dressed with the tinsel of camp. To watch "The Godfather" now is not unlike going to hear Puccini; soap opera coexists with high art. Time has changed the nature of our pleasure. Similarly, when you see Brando in the opening scene of "The Godfather," dispensing favors in his gloomy study, you can't help thinking of all the parodies that followed, including Brando himself as a bulked-up version of Don Corleone in the Matthew Broderick vehicle "The Freshman."

The characters in "The Sopranos" are obsessed with "The Godfather," but their maker is obsessed with Martin Scorsese and his street-level view of things. David Chase thought the Mafia movie had finally exhausted itself in 1990 with "GoodFellas." Scorsese's gangster films, beginning with "Mean Streets," in 1973, are about guys who sit around all day eating, gabbing, and collecting money in bags, guys who intimidate truck drivers and mailmen, guys for whom no petty scam is an indignity. Chase pays homage to "GoodFellas" by having the actor Michael Imperioli, who was shot in the foot in Scorsese's film, do the same thing to a bakery clerk in the series. Most of the criticism of Coppola's "Godfather III" focussed on the script, which was inferior to the first two. But, by the nineties, the problem was a proper suspension of disbelief. Somehow, the sight of Al Pacino, as the aging Don, trying to lean on the Vatican in "Godfather III" is no less funny than Pacino, as a nudnik gangster in "Donnie Brasco" (1997), trying to bust open parking meters with a sledgehammer. Chase's creative leap was to grasp the transformation of the Mob genre, its passage from tragedy to farce, and, against all odds, make something new.

There are still mobsters today in racketeering, labor unions, and gambling, but no one questions that Cosa Nostra, the real one, is fast expiring. As Tony laments in the pilot episode, "I came in at the end. The best is over." Prosecutors and gangsters agree on the reasons: federal initiatives like the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act and the effectiveness of investigators, who mastered the art of wiretapping and flipping witnesses, have nearly wiped out the Five Families. David Kelley, the chief of organized crime and terrorism in the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, told me, "All the old rituals and codes have eroded over time, and the reasons are simple: greed and convenience. There's a sense now of every man for himself, a turn from 'this thing of ours' to 'this thing of mine.' " Gangsters used to talk righteously about avoiding the drug trade, but they couldn't resist the profit margins; and when a gangster is facing ten to life for narcotics trafficking—as opposed to a few years for hijacking a truck—he is more likely to testify for the government. Also, as Tony Soprano demonstrates, the Mafia life is highly stressful, what with all the beatings and the search warrants. Many elders would get out if they could ("I don't want it. The whole [expletive] life"), and many of them do what they can to make sure their kids go straight. More and more, the Mafia has gone small-time. Pump-and-dump brokerage scams and truck hijackings are nice, but they are hardly the stuff of "The Godfather."

In the movies, gangsters are appealing because they embody not only a rude dominance but also a code and a sentiment, a fantasy of brotherhood. In the postindustrial world of no loyalties, of no commitments, gangsters trade blood oaths. "He's a friend of ours"—that's the way a Mob guy introduces a second guy to a third. But if that was ever true it was long ago. Real mobsters, especially our degraded contemporaries, are not as satanically charming as Bob Hoskins in "The Long Good Friday" or as hypnotically intelligent as Christopher Walken in "King of New York." A few years ago, a friend, a prosecutor, asked if I wanted to write about a Mob assassin who was in the witness-protection program. He was living in what the prosecutor called "a warm state." Johnny Johnson (a bogus name, but why get him shot?) was small and middle-aged; he had, for a living, killed people on behalf of the Gordon Chandler Mob, one of Harlem's biggest heroin-and-numbers outfits. He had killed at least ten men, spent more than half his life in jail, fuzzed his mind with dope and angel dust, turned state's evidence, and, thanks to "the program," avoided a rat's assassination. Now he was selling aluminum siding and coaching Little League. He lived in a dim house on a busy street. Sometimes he slipped back to the city to see a woman, and sometimes the woman slipped down to see him, a practice that is not, strictly speaking, a bright idea.

For a couple of days, he talked about his life, about his horrible childhood and the squalid city institutions that made a pass at raising him, about his attraction to the glittering crooks in the neighborhood. ("My real father," he said, "was Bumpy Johnson," the infamous Harlem gangster, who died in 1968.) He talked about his first murder ("When it happened, I didn't give a fuck, no remorse"), and then he talked about his second and his third and his fourth. He talked about meeting John Gotti and "Jerry the Jew" and an entire rainbow coalition of thugs and how someone got his head bashed in with a baseball bat. On and on the pornography of his life unspooled, and sometimes he'd deliver it flat, like a machine, and other times he'd catch himself, and he'd cry awhile. He cried all through lunch at the International House of Pancakes. At times, he was terrifying to listen to, at others excruciatingly boring. Finally, as I was getting ready to leave, Johnny asked me, "So, how much?" He wanted to get paid for his interview. It was no simple thing explaining to a retired professional assassin why I couldn't do that. Johnny saw the interview as merely a first step. He wanted a book deal and then a movie. The aluminum-siding business wasn't coming through with the cash, and it certainly wasn't giving him what he thought was his due. He had only one commodity to his name: his story. But hadn't we heard it before? There are more black-Mob pictures than we know what to do with: "Black Caesar," "Hoodlum," "New Jack City." What's left? A kreplach-Mob picture? Done: Sergio Leone's "Once Upon a Time in America." A Russian Mob picture? Try "Little Odessa." Even David Chase thinks the genre, like the cowboy movie, like the Busby Berkeley musical, has reached the vanishing point. "And I don't care if I never see another one," he said. In one episode of "The Sopranos," midway through the first season, the young, impetuous mobster Christopher Moltisanti, played by Michael Imperioli, tries to write a screenplay in the hours when he is not robbing trucks or picking up cannolis for Tony. He seems almost to speak for Chase.

"I love movies, you know that," Christopher tells his girlfriend. "That smell in Blockbuster! That candy-and-carpet smell? I get high off of it. Am I gonna let all this love and knowledge go to waste? My cousin Gregory's girlfriend, Amy, the one who works for Tarantino, said, Mob stories are always hot. I can make my mark!" But Tony would sooner see Christopher dead than let him spill the family secrets. And, besides, Christopher can barely spell, much less give new life to an old genre. That work is left to an outsider, to David Chase. And, as Chase told me, there's probably only one more season left in him before "The Sopranos" gets stale. He wants out. His next planned project is a feature, backed by HBO and distributed by Warner Brothers. And it is not about the Mafia. It's about the Christian-rock scene.

Mother of Mercy, is this the end of Rico? ◆

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

THE AMERICAN PERSUASION

Part I: The Scent of Liberty

BY IAN FRAZIER

George Washington dabbed a few drops of fragrance behind his ears and turned from his dressing table to face the handsome Marquis. The question remained unspoken between them, hanging in the candlelight.

"More brandy, General?" The Marquis broke the silence.

"No, thank you. I don't like what it does to my face."

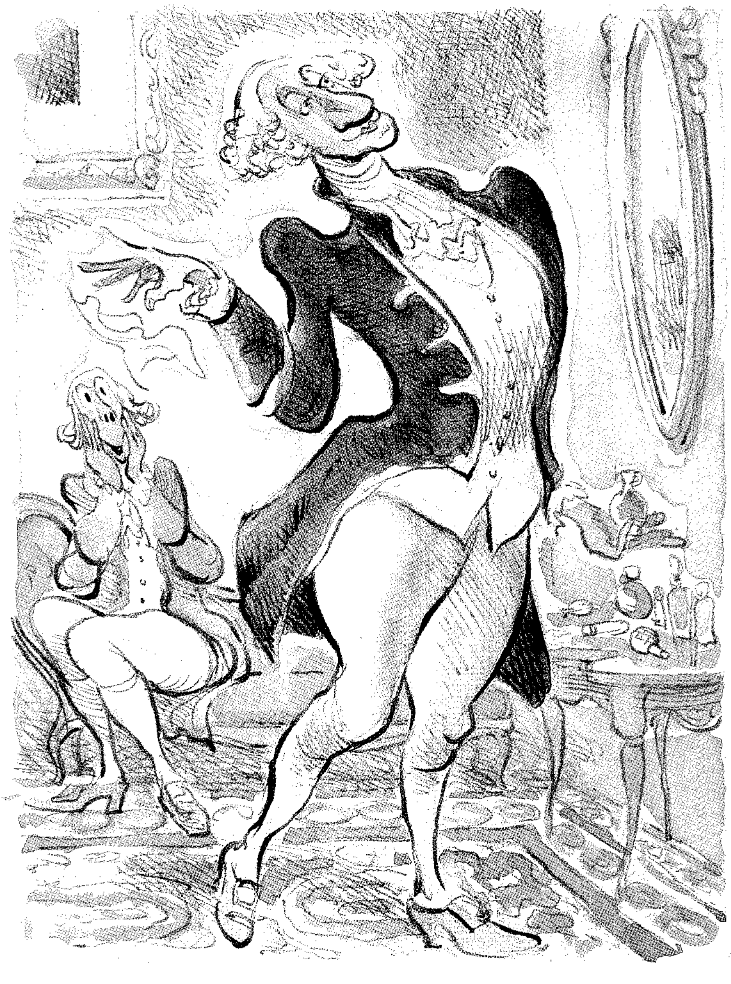
The General looked away again, and made a mouth at himself in the dressing-table mirror. For a long moment, as if he were alone in the room, he studied what he saw there—those remarkable features which, he knew, looked different to each person who saw them. To one observer, he appeared to be a Roman senator in toga and mantle; to another, a rough-hewn American everyman; to another, a fascinating coquette; to another, great Mars himself, indomitable god of war. Since his youth, Washington had understood the power of his beauty, and he was not above using it now.

"But my dear Monsieur Marquis," he said, in a low and thrilling tone, "you give me no answer to my request!"

The Marquis threw back his head and laughed a long laugh, loud and Gallic. "Ah, you are a persistent minx, my dear General. What can I do but agree? Yes, very well—I will help you in your 'revolution,' Monsieur Washington, since you are so eager that I do so. Now come here and sit on the divan, and let's have a better look at you."

Subtle, flirtatious, and amusing (as well as honest and upright), George Washington led the colonists' war against the British with all the wiles at his command. Contemporaries marvelled at the flexibility of his methods when pursuing a much desired goal. It was perhaps a lucky accident of history that his cause was aided by patriots nearly as nuanced and seductive as he: in Boston were Paul Revere and John Hancock and the Adamses, noted voluptuaries and lovers of pleasure, easily distinguished in a crowd by the rich, ambergris-based New England bath oils in which they drenched themselves. From Virginia came the great planter aristocrats, with their blooded horses and sumptuous homes—statesmen like the elusive Jefferson and the cunning Henry Lee, and James Madison, so lively and changeable he was called the Chameleon. But to their homegrown talents Washington wished to add that skill at maneuvering and intrigue which is distinctively French. Thus, his single-minded courtship of the Marquis, who would one day be known to history as the Revolution's hero, the noble Lafayette.

Indeed, the Frenchman eventually became quite besotted with the American commander, as Washington grew stronger and the balance of power between them shifted. In his journal for November 8, 1779, Lafayette wrote, "At G.W.'s headquarters this morning—left my *carte de visite*. The adjutant, however, told me the General was out. Such trickery! I am certain he was nearby, from the intoxicating aroma of that perfume he always wears. Later I learned he had really been within, conferring with that Pole, Colonel Kosciuszko. He is playing the two of us poor foreigners against each other. Even worse, his cruel plan will succeed. Tomorrow I will tell him he can have still more troops, and more louis from my personal fortune, Heaven forgive my soul!"



PAT OLIPHANT

Often, for consolation, Lafayette turned to Benjamin Franklin, the fabulously wealthy Philadelphian, one of the most skillful backstairs fixers in Revolutionary times. Franklin's bald pate,

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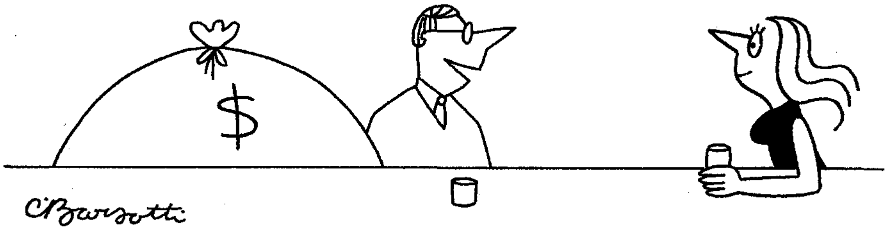
side hair, and little glasses belied the shrewd and jaded sophisticate behind the mask. Few of his fellow-colonists were more comfortable with their sexuality than Franklin was with his. His wide and varied erotic experience gave him much in common with the European nobility with whom he dealt as America's first ambassador; had circumstances been different, he might well have become the leading courtesan of the age. Franklin hated sexual repressiveness of any kind, and also the unfair tax on tea. Following his example, America's fledgling diplomatic corps developed a policy of sexual uninhibitedness and support for democratic principles which would become the hallmark of the new country's foreign relations.

Quaker Moonlight, Franklin's favorite scent, came in a little spray bottle shaped like William Penn and contained a large percentage of animal essences that we now know to be pheromones. All Franklin and his fellow-colonists knew was that it worked. When they had a rich arms manufacturer or financier they particularly wanted to impress, they really poured it on, and set the poor man's head aswirl. Some of Franklin's business deals were taught in European universities for years after the Revolutionary War had been won. Eminent statesmen in far-off capitals still blushed when they remembered how the street-smart Pennsylvanian had led them on.

Cajoling, finagling, marching, greasing a few palms, and turning on the charm when necessary, the brave Colonial soldiers gradually overcame the resistance of the British Army. Redcoated regulars who had fought in India and Ireland proved vulnerable to tactics they had never met before. In South Carolina, Francis Marion, the colonists' famed Swamp Fox, filled an opposing general's tent with flowers on the eve of an important battle, and added a flattering note about how handsomely the Englishman sat on his horse; discomfited, though more than a little pleased, the English general did not know what to do, and the next morning withdrew in confusion from the field. Personality and salesmanship were the weapons of choice in Northern regions like New Hampshire and Vermont. Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys, for example, had smiles that could absolutely make you melt. Concerned about the large number of loyalists in that region, Ethan Allen's ragtag band of farmers and tradesmen took every one of them to lunch, handed out small gift baskets of toiletries, and were rewarded with a very high rate of conversion. (After the war, however, they hanged every former loyalist they could find.)

Allen and his men wore a perfume they invented themselves, a kind of balsam-juniper-bay-rum thing, which made a strong statement about who they were. Essentially, what it said was "Don't tread on me! Live free or die!" etc.—but not in an off-putting way. Unfortunately, the original recipe has been lost. Allen always emphasized to his soldiers the importance of how they presented themselves.

Indeed, his training was so successful that many of his troops, former mountain hayseeds, were able to get jobs in the public sector after the war. This pattern was repeated among many veterans of the Continental Army, from general down to private. A number of high-ranking officers caught the eye of their British opponents, and obtained lucrative positions in England after they were mustered out. Similarly, many of the rank-and-file soldiers learned skills in

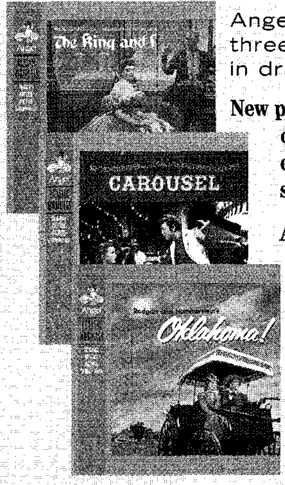


"It's the new black."

the service which made them excellent butlers and footmen and contributed to a sharp postwar drop in the unemployment rolls.

By the end of the Revolutionary War, what we have come to think of as "the American style" had been fully formed. Soon, all the world would know of this new country and of its people, who were like none that had ever been seen before. This newly minted person, the American, was an independent fellow—bold, forthright, deeply aware of how he looked and smelled, and unashamed of his sensuality. He knew his young country didn't have the mightiest Army or Navy, and yet he bowed down to no one, except in business deals where it was customary and he had to, and he feared, as he put it, "nobody but the loan officer and God." He believed in freedom, wife swapping, couples sex, and the rule of law, and he clearly embodied these beliefs (except some of them) in a noble document, the Constitution. He was friendly as could be, and he loved a good party, and the next morning you might wonder what it was he'd sold you a thousand of, but that was just his way.

He didn't care what anybody said or wrote. He didn't care, probably, if you lived or died. But then maybe he'd see a different aspect to you and get to feeling sentimental, and send a package in the mail. He loved the land; no matter whose it was, he loved it all the same. Filled with a restless energy, the American was always moving on, and making sure you did, too. But introduce him to a powerful magnate and offer him regular overtime plus insurance and benefits, and that would definitely get his attention. He knew how to please a boss, and industry flocked to him. But then someday he might buy a lucky lottery ticket and win so much money that he bought out the boss and now everybody had to call *him* boss, and how about that? It happened all the time. In the ceaseless creation and re-creation first set in motion by the savvy Founding Fathers, the churning engine of democracy made the same people wealthy again and again, while the American moved to take his place center stage in world affairs. At last, Washington's lushly perfumed dream was about to unfold. ◆



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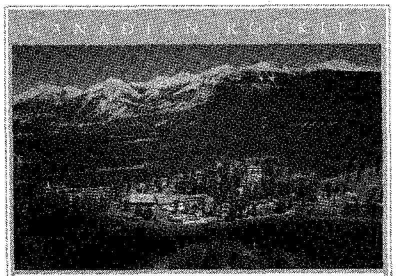

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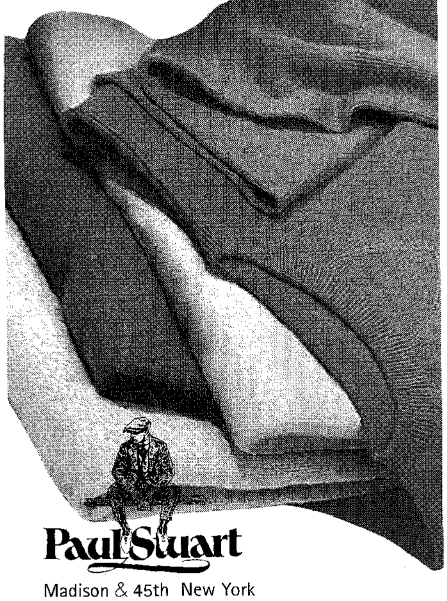

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OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

VILLAGE LIFE

Three decades of looking through the rear window.

BY MARY LOUISE WILSON

The windows in the back rooms of that apartment on West Twelfth Street looked out over the gardens of the brownstones on Bank Street. It was a parlor floor-through with thirteen-foot ceilings and two marble fireplaces, and the rent, even for 1965, was unbelievably low. I was told later that there had been a fire in the apartment above mine and that the renter, a nurse, had been tied up and immolated. The building repairs, done by relatives of the landlord, were apparently not up to code, and that was why the rents hadn't gone up since the nineteen-fifties.

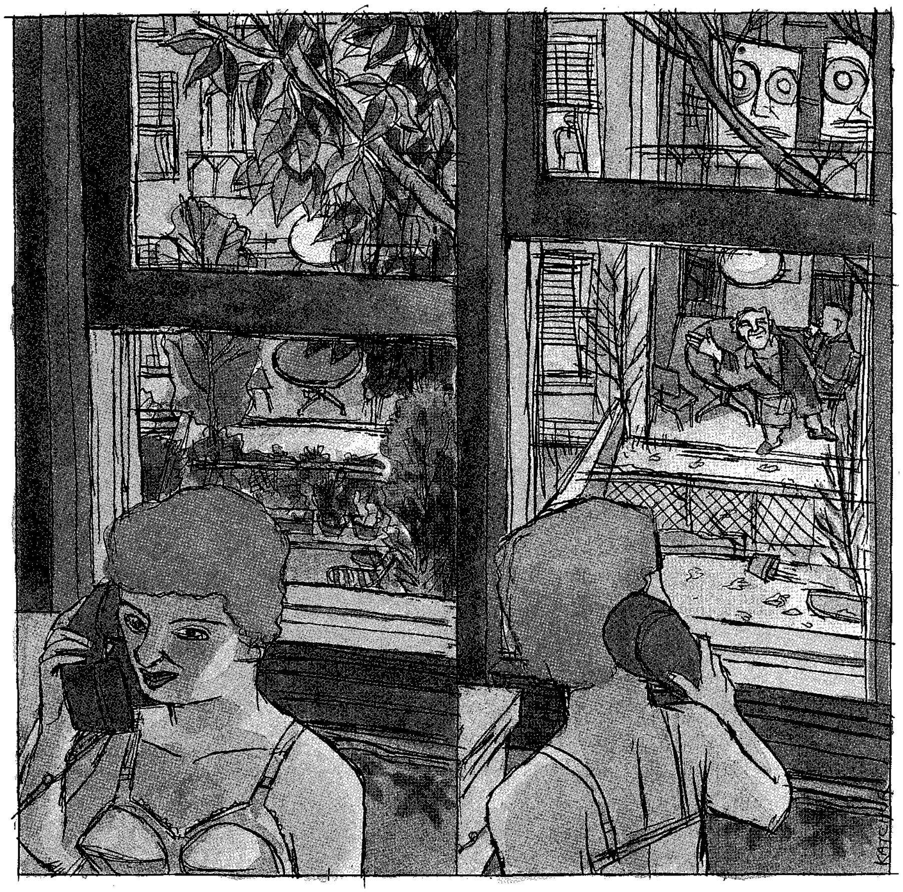
The back wall of the brownstone behind mine was glass, and the upper floor was a painter's studio. The painter was a full-blooded American Indian princess, who had been married to the heir to a shoe fortune and was well known in the art world. I knew this through my brother's ex-wife, who lived in the brownstone next door to mine. Actually, she was the one who had first told me about my apartment. She was friendly with the princess's present husband, who could see from his house that the apartment was empty. (I will call the princess and her husband Buffie and Arnold, although these are not their real names, nor are the names of anyone else I mention here.)

It was impossible not to look. Buffie's huge canvases of Indian heads stared out at me from the studio. The heads had zonked-out eyes like slices of Dole pineapple. This was around the time that the film "Little Big Man" came out—the latest revisionist Western, in which we learned that the white man was the bad guy. The lower floor of the house was the living-dining area. An enormous Noguchi moon hung over the Eames dining table and chairs. In the warm months, the view was pretty much obscured by greenery, but when the sliding-glass doors were open you could hear everything. Buffie was short and round, with gray hair parted severely down the middle and terminating in tiny braids. She wore caftans and enormous necklaces and bracelets, and she had a voice like a jungle bird. One warm spring day, I heard her unmistakable squawk directed at somebody on my side of the garden. She was standing at the edge of her patio pointing up and to her left. I leaned as far out of my window as I dared and saw that someone had put a clothesline up there and was pinning laundry onto it. Buffie was demanding a word with the disembodied hands that flickered in the depths of the window, but the line continued unabated, creaking out more and more underpants and dishcloths.

Buffie looked out on brownstones like her own, but the occupants on my side were renters whose standards of taste were naturally not as stringent as hers. For the most part, she did as we on our side did—she cast a blind eye, or pretended to. At no time did she acknowledge my existence. Arnold, on the other hand, waved frenetically whenever he caught me looking. We had never actually met, but he seemed to feel that we had. I had been told that Arnold was a physicist and an inventor. He certainly had the hair for it—it exploded around his head. He walked around holding one arm crooked at the elbow, wrist dangling, owing to a radiation accident.

My desk, a slab of butcher block, was shoved up against the back windows. One Saturday, I was standing on it, watering my spider plant, and I noticed Arnold standing with another man in the studio. They were looking over at me, smiling and waving. Arnold kept pointing at the other man with his good hand. I looked again; the other man was Donald, an old boyfriend I hadn't seen in about eight years. What the hell was he doing over there? I retreated into the bathroom. The phone rang. It was Arnold telling me that

Donald was sober now. I hadn't known that Donald had a drinking problem.


Buffie never acknowledged my existence, but Arnold waved every time he saw me.

BEN KATCHOR

Buffie and Arnold threw cocktail parties. A crowd of the fashionably dressed would suddenly materialize while I was in the kitchen in my underwear, heating up my favorite comfort food, "train wreck," a stew of tomatoes, bread, butter, and sugar. I'd emerge, sit down at my desk, and there they were, in Buffie's studio or on the upstairs terrace, clutching drinks and tiny napkins and staring curiously down into my windows. There were other times when I'd be taking a sip of my first Martini of the evening and they'd appear, sipping theirs; I felt a little like Frankie in "The Member of the Wedding."

I was throwing my own parties in these early years, big noisy affairs. Once, we had simultaneous parties, crowds gaping at crowds across the way. That night, Arnold called up. I saw him waving the phone receiver at me. He had a fellow there who wanted to meet me, a nice Jewish violinist with the Philharmonic looking for a gal. He put the man standing next to him on the phone and some drunken conversation took place. I believe that was the last time I had any direct contact with Arnold.

Somewhere in here, I got married, my husband moved in, and my brother moved out of his apartment and in with his ex-wife, next door to me. There was a citywide blackout, "Hair" opened on Broadway, and men walked on the moon. I watched Julia Child on television and cooked soufflés and brains in our vestigial kitchen.

Then I bought a maxicoat and started wearing false eyelashes to go to the grocery, there was the energy crisis and Watergate. Buffie and Arnold occasionally had vigorous dinner discussions. Chairs shot back from the table, napkins were hurled to the floor, pacing ensued; when my relatives came to visit, the moment the yelling commenced my lights went out and we took our seats at the window.

My husband and I broke up, he moved out, and my African-American lover moved in. A punk rocker rented the apartment below ours, a skinny, chalk-white kid with a dyed-black Mohawk, a nose ring, and a thick Liverpudlian accent. He and his lady, a big blonde in circle skirts and eye glitter, smoked dope, made noisy love, and planted irises and roses and a cherry tree in the little yard below my window, transforming the mess of cat turds and rusted lawn furniture into a charming English cottage garden.

Buffie developed a fondness for birds. She had feeders put up on her patio and spent mornings out there, twittering and chirruping at them. At some point, I noticed that she had lost weight. As the months went by, she got thinner and thinner, and then I didn't see her coming out to the feeders. One afternoon, a small sombre group dressed in black gathered on the terrace clutching drinks and tiny napkins.

My African-American lover turned out to be a cross-dresser and moved out, I got a running part on a television series and moved to L.A. After four months, I moved back and started noticing a young woman in hippie dress and sandals shoving a mop around the studio, sweeping the patio, flicking a dust rag over the Eames furniture with a desultory air. The cleaning lady? There was no sign of Arnold. The bird feeders were empty. The girl had a cat she let in and out. It seemed to be her only companion. After watching the girl with little interest for a few weeks, I made an important discovery. She was developing a tummy. I wasn't absolutely sure at first—she wore loose shirts—but, yes, she was getting bigger.

One afternoon, I looked up from my peanut-butter sandwich and saw a gathering of people on the terrace holding champagne glasses and surrounding the pregnant girl in white. The bride's bouquet ribbons fluttered across her belly, and Arnold stood next to her, wearing a dark suit and an ecstatic smile. A while later, I saw the girl walking around the house jiggling a small bundle slung over her shoulder.

Buffie's Indian canvases were superseded by the construction of a floor-to-ceiling storage wall with myriad drawers and shelves painted a vivid French blue. From what I could see, this was a new office area for Arnold. He sometimes worked at a desk facing the glass. Perhaps he would now be inventing things at home.

Ronald Reagan was elected President, there was a recession, and a young couple moved into the house next to the glass house. A friendship struck up between the houses, and there was much back-and-forthing by the new woman to visit the mother and child. The new woman looked like a Westchester transplant, with her ironed jeans and military bob. I began seeing her out on her patio in a man's shirt and big yellow rubber gloves. She had a set of rusted bedsprings propped up on sawhorses and was attempting to paint them a bright Breuer orange. I never figured out what she had in mind. She abandoned the project and started hopping over to her neighbors' house with armloads of architectural blueprints. Pretty soon, workmen arrived with sledgehammers and took down her back wall.

One day in June, during the remodelling, the workmen had their ghetto blaster turned up full volume. I shouted at them to turn it down, but they didn't hear. I stood on my desk and shouted through the open window. I shouted louder. The phone rang. A clear, sweet voice said, "This is Katie Schulman. The phone number over there is . . ." Katie Schulman? *Arnold* Schulman! The new wife! Katie! I was shocked, elated, mortified. She was aware of me. I felt a ridiculous surge of affection toward this voice.

THREE DREAMS AFTER A SUICIDE

(ANN SEXTON, 1974)

1.
We're gathered in the funeral home, your friends
who are not themselves especially friends,
with you laid out on view in the approved fashion
wearing the bright-red reading dress with cut-glass buttons
that wink at the ceiling, when you spring
like a jack-in-the-box from the coffin
crying, Boo! I was only fooling!

2.
After the terrible whipping you are
oddly pleased with yourself,
an impenitent child, the winner.
It's Daddy Death who's quit.
Once more you've worn him out
from all his lifting and striking.
His belt lies shredded in his meaty fist.

3.
We are standing together in a sunless garden
in Rockport, Mass. I'm wearing the hat
the artist painted you in
and suddenly swarms of wasps
fly up under the downturned brim.

O death, where is thy sting?
Tar baby, it is stickered to me; you
were my wasp and I your jew.

—Maxine Kumin

The punk rocker was evicted, and I went on tour in "Odd Couple, Female Version" for eight months. When I got back, I saw that the house next to the Schulmans' now had a glassed-in parlor floor featuring ugly wood panelling and a glaringly bright chandelier. The young couple had moved and been replaced by an uncompelling Arab family. A blue-and-yellow plastic swing set dominated their patio.

The Schulman baby was now a little boy. The little boy had a springer-spaniel puppy. I signed up for a writing course at Columbia, and every morning I got up very early, sat down at the typewriter facing the back windows, and attempted to write. And every morning the mother and child went through their routine of breakfast, play, lunch, and nap. The glass had become a fourth wall in the true sense. The child's drawings and various other items were taped to it, and a sofa was shoved up against it in the upstairs studio, facing a television set. Sometimes, when the boy was napping, Katie Schulman sat on the sofa and watched Oprah Winfrey. I found myself watching over her shoulder.

Now and then, I witnessed scenes of horror and retribution. Once, a long, gut-wrenching moan suddenly emerged from the leafy depths of the patio: "*No! No! No! Why did you do that*?" After a tiny pause, the child's voice rose in an extended shriek, and then everything just as quickly subsided into the former morning quiet, broken only by birdsong and the occasional grinding of a garbage truck.

Arnold never seemed to be home when I was looking. Once I spotted him on the Saw Mill River Parkway. He passed me in the fast lane in a little red Fiat Spider. He was chattering away to the man next to him, hair strands whipping around his head. It was an odd sensation to glimpse him so far off the premises. One Sunday morning, he appeared at the Eames dining table in his bathrobe. A large man about the same age as Arnold entered the dining area in rumpled pajama cutoffs, followed by a matron in rollers and housecoat, both with an air of having inadvertently stepped onto the stage at Radio City Music Hall. I wondered if they were the little boy's grandparents.

The Trump Tower went up on Fifth Avenue, Ronald Reagan was reëlected, and padded shoulders got so big it was hard to get through doors. The little boy had birthday parties. A couple of times, I passed him and his mother on the street. My heart pounded violently. She didn't appear to recognize me; her eyes flickered past mine. I was surprised to discover how pretty her eyes were. And the child was beautiful. I wondered briefly if she deliberately chose not to know me. I knew her so well.

One day, an exotically feathered bird appeared in the now defunct cottage garden below my window. I leaned out of my window, talked to it, and dropped bread down to it, and it didn't fly away. It was still there the next day. The phone rang. It was a man who lived in the house facing mine across Twelfth Street. "Katie Schulman called to tell us you found our bird in your garden. May I come and retrieve it?" What was he talking about? It took me a minute. They were friends over my head, Katie and the people across the street from me.

My brother and his ex-wife remarried and moved out of the apartment next door. I bought an old house in upstate New York, gave up drinking, and went on a three-month tour in "Social Security."

Then I came back from two weeks upstate and noticed that the upper and lower floors of the Schulman house were empty. The Noguchi moon, the Eames chairs and table, everything was gone. I assumed that the Schulmans were having the place painted and the floors done while they were away for the summer. In the fall, the place was still empty, but I could not entertain the idea that they might be gone. Then, around Thanksgiving time, I saw a young couple, nondescript professional types, looking the place over, and soon after that they moved in.

It had never occurred to me that the Schulmans would be anything less than permanent. I'd thought that I was the one who was passing through. The new couple covered the glass upstairs with a white curtain. They were there for a year or so, and then were replaced by another, equally faceless couple.

I had always feared that I might have to leave the Village. The rent on my lovely apartment remained so low that I never stopped expecting expulsion. In the meantime, while I had been fixated on the house behind mine—while my back was turned, so to speak—Gus's fruit-and-vegetable store on the corner of Twelfth and West Fourth had been replaced by an apartment building, the garage across the street from me was turned into condos, and Heller's, the liquor store around the corner which kept house keys and cashed checks for people, was now a dry cleaner's. Sutter's bakery was gone, and so was Saul & Min's, the little store where you could buy everything from crêpe paper to rat poison. And the magnificent, block-sized garden jungle with eight-foot rosebushes that had flourished on the site of the old Loews Sheridan Theatre had been razed by St. Vincent's Hospital to make way for an ugly brick bunker that some people said was where they kept the body parts. As things turned out, it was the Village that had left me.

I hung on, even though the building I lived in had become such a crumbling eyesore that I had cabdrivers drop me off at the house next door. There were only two occupants left. The top-floor apartment and the one below mine were vacant. The door to the garden was unlocked, and every so often people were discovered sleeping in the hall. There was Gorbachev and glasnost and the Iran-Contra scandal, and then the Berlin Wall came down, and the owner of the building died. The building was left to two women, who, as fate would have it, lived near me in upstate New York. We knew each other by sight from town-board meetings. They apologetically brought eviction proceedings against me for owning a second residence, and three months later I moved out. ◆

From an advertisement in the Washington Post.

Indeed, if you look down the list of luxury features available on most cars and compare them to the home the car is parked next to, the house often comes out a poor second. From tinted windows with solar reflective glass and electric defrosters, to a high power stereo, to automatic climate control with allergy and odor filters, to interior lighting schemes that relegate most home lighting to the dark ages, automobiles are offering amenities to satisfy the most incriminating tastes.

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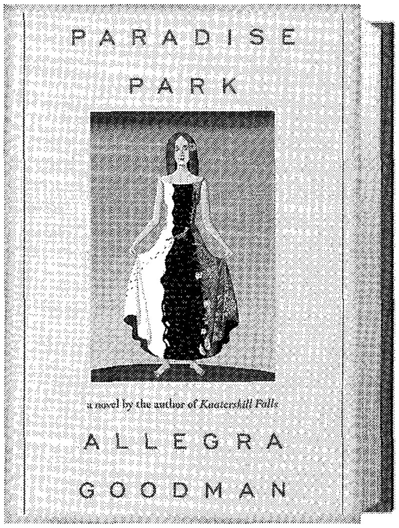

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ANNALS OF WAR

THE PRISONER

The bitter heroism of America's longest-held P.O.W.

BY TOM PHILPOTT

In the late nineteen-sixties, at the height of the Vietnam War, the Pentagon identified the longest-held American prisoner of war in Southeast Asia as Lieutenant Everett Alvarez, Jr., a Navy pilot who had been shot down over North Vietnam in August, 1964. Nine years later, when the P.O.W.s came home, Alvarez took part in a nationally televised celebration of the repatriation, presided over by Bob Hope, in Oklahoma City. Among those at the event was an Army Special Forces officer, Lieutenant Colonel Floyd (Jim) Thompson, who had been captured in March, 1964, more than four months before Alvarez. Colonel Thompson's ordeal had been unusually severe. He had spent the first five years of his captivity in solitary confinement, mostly in remote jungle camps in the mountains of South Vietnam and Laos. He had endured beatings, disease, and starvation, and five times had tried, unsuccessfully, to escape. He was not allowed to join other American P.O.W.s until 1969, when he was near death.

A dinner was held for the P.O.W.s the night before the taping of the show. In 1986, Alvarez told me about that evening:

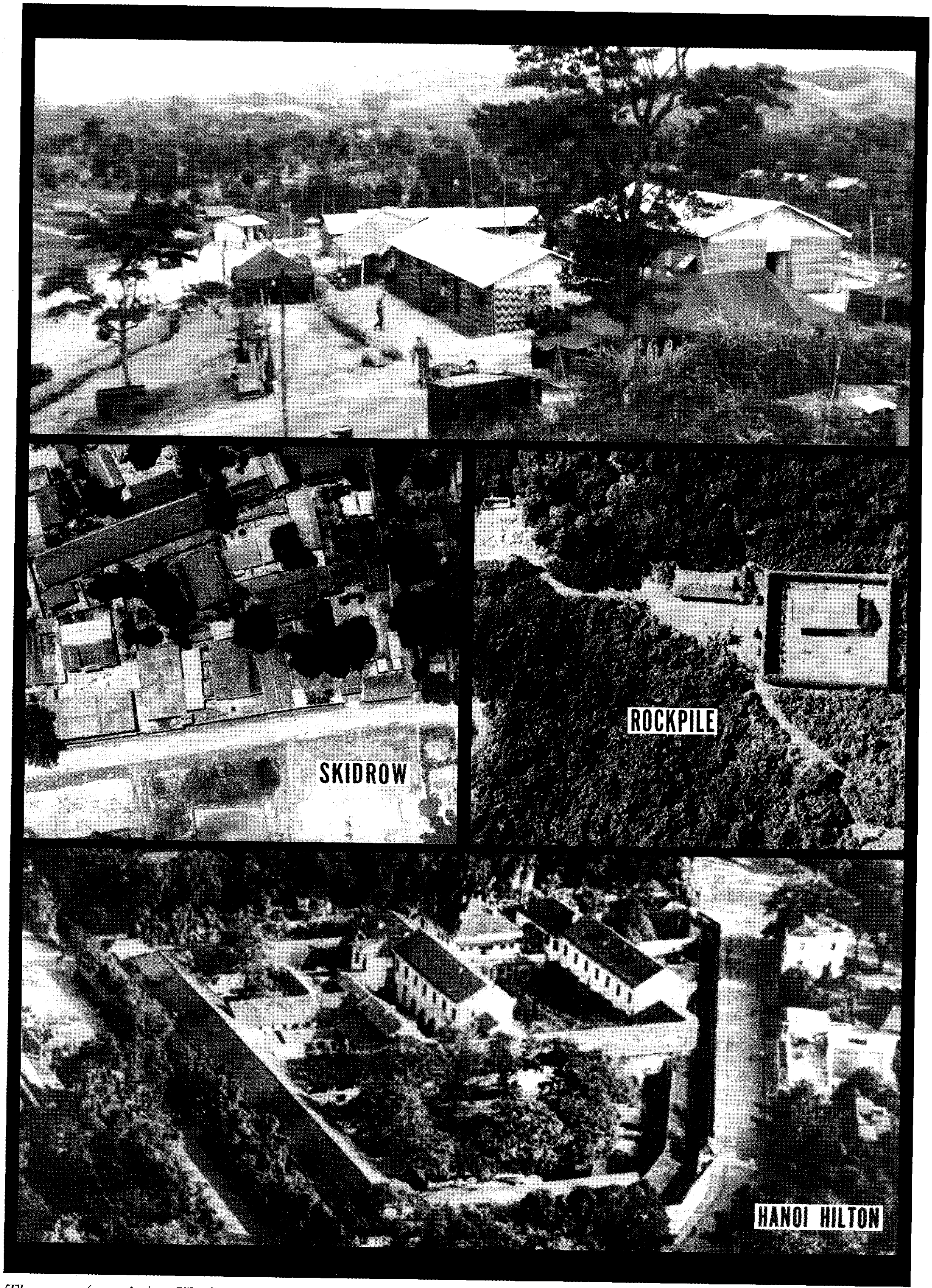
> Jim was at a separate table. . . . I turned to the lady I was escorting, a local they had fixed me up with, and I said, "This is Jim Thompson. He was longest-held. He was there nine years."
>
> She looked at him and said, "Am I supposed to be impressed or something?"
>
> Right there, I wrote her off. I mean, I was awed to be in Jim's presence.
>
> Earlier that day, we had some rehearsing to do. . . . The TV people brought by captions that would be superimposed on the screen. They wanted to make sure they spelled our names right.
>
> Below mine, it said, "Longest-held P.O.W."
>
> "Wait a minute," I said. "I'm not the longest-held. He is."
>
> "Who is he?"
>
> "Colonel Thompson."
>
> "Oh."
>
> To me, Jim was a hero. Yet people still referred to me as the longest-held. I wondered why. Well, that night I asked him.
>
> "Jim," I said, "how come they don't call you the first?"
>
> He didn't answer me.

In March, 1984, eleven years after Jim Thompson's return, I met him at his home, in Key West, Florida. He was then fifty-one years old, and lived alone. He had been divorced twice and was estranged from his four children. Three years earlier, he had suffered a heart attack, and then a stroke, which had left him unable to speak clearly or at length.

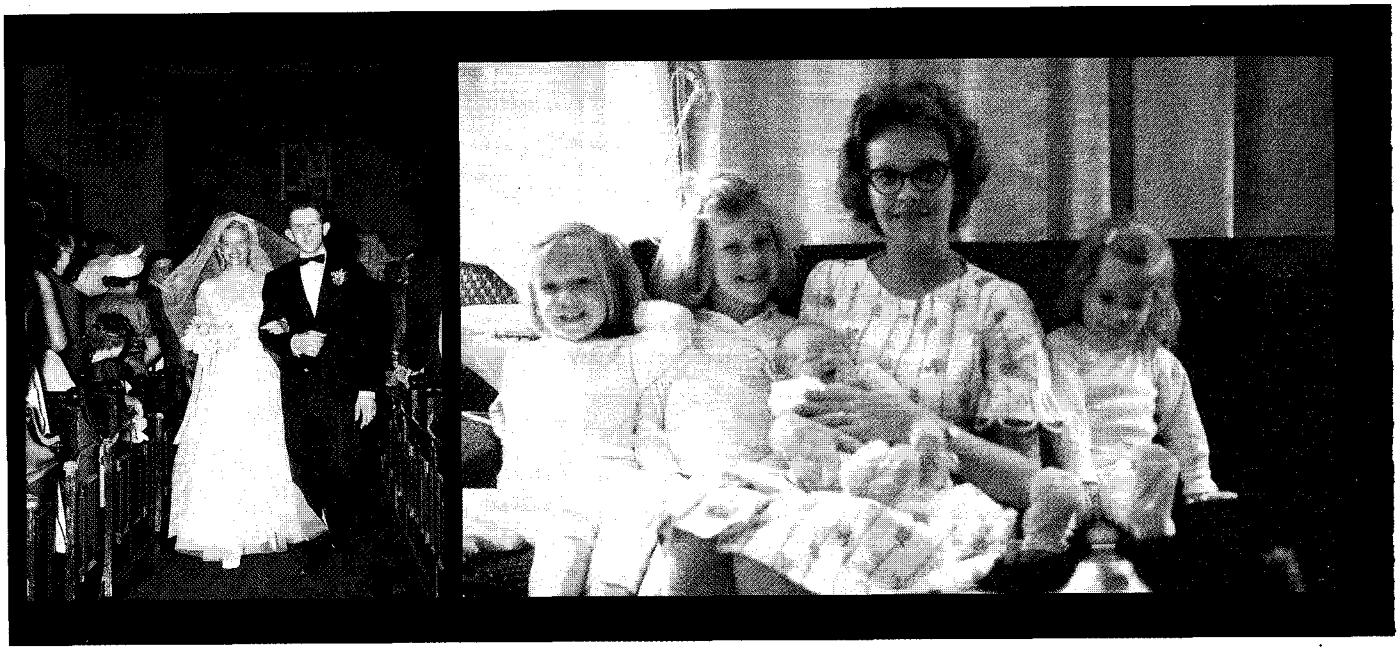
Thompson was living in a fourth-floor condominium. He was a slender, gray-haired man, in a white polo shirt and shorts, with a deep tan and vivid blue eyes. As he walked, his right shoulder sagged. He sat down in a white leather easy chair. His right arm hung limply at his side, and, with his left hand, he drew a cigarette pack and lighter from his breast pocket, jerked out a cigarette, and lit it.

I tried to get him to talk about his captivity, but his responses were clipped or mangled. Finally, he got up and turned on an old reel-to-reel tape deck. The voice of a radio-talk-show host introduced Thompson as a "special guest,"

COURTESY HERBERT HOFF; OPPOSITE TOP: NELSON SMITH; OTHERS: D.O.D.


SKIDROW
ROCKPILE
HANOI HILTON

Thompson (opposite) at Khe Sanh; the Special Forces compound (top), and three camps in North Vietnam where he was a prisoner.



Alyce and Jim Thompson on their wedding day, in 1953; Alyce, with their children (from left, Laura, Pam, Jim, Jr., and Ruth), in 1964.

and then Thompson's voice—young and articulate—filled the room. He lit another cigarette and said, "Listen."

During the next fifteen years, in the course of researching a book about Thompson, I sought out as many people as I could who had known him before, during, and after his imprisonment—family members, friends, fellow-soldiers, Army doctors and psychiatrists. I also gained access to a long, unpublished interview that Thompson had given, soon after his return, to a *Reader's Digest* writer and editor named Kenneth Y. Tomlinson as background for "P.O.W.," a book about American prisoner-of-war experiences in Vietnam. Eventually, I was able to piece together an account of what Thompson went through during his captivity, and what he and his family suffered after he returned home.

Jim Thompson was born in 1933, in Bergenfield, New Jersey. His father, Ben, was a bus driver on the commuter run into New York City. Born and brought up in Texas, Ben Thompson had been an infantryman in the First World War. Jim's older brother, Danny, was, by all accounts, their father's favorite. Jim took after their mother, Elizabeth, a housewife and a devout member of the Dutch Reformed church. A close childhood friend recalls that, in sixteen years, Jim never missed a Sunday-school class.

Much later, while undergoing treatment for alcoholism and depression at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Thompson spoke about his childhood to Captain Pascal Batson, an Army psychiatrist, remembering bitterly that he had been "tormented" by both his father and his brother. "I don't think Jim was beaten much physically," Batson told me in 1984, when I spoke with him. "It was more the psychological beatings he remembered. It was a very sterile existence at home—little softness there. Jim never understood why his father and his brother picked on him."

Thompson grew up during the Second World War, and his heroes were the men who had gone off to fight. As a teen-ager, he had a job in an A. & P., and he proved to be an unusually hard worker. Still, he developed a streak of adolescent rebelliousness, cultivating a taste for alcohol, although his parents were both teetotallers. His mother belonged to the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and, to upset her, he would make a point of having a couple of beers before picking her up after the group's meetings.

In 1952, Thompson, who had graduated from high school and was working full time at the A. & P., met Alyce deVries. She was two years younger than he and still in high school. Her childhood, like Thompson's, had been difficult. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, her father enlisted in the Navy as a Seabee, and, while he was away, her mother began seeing other men. When he returned home and discovered his wife's infidelity, he ordered her to leave. For the next two years, Alyce and her mother lived in a boarding house, before moving in with a widower named Lester Michels, who had four children of his own. The relationship started out happily enough, but Michels was a drinker, and he could be violent.

Shortly after Alyce turned eighteen, she and Thompson were married. He was still working at the A. & P., and his ambition was to become a store manager. As a boy, Thompson had fallen off a horse and broken his neck, and the doctors had said that he would never be able to serve in the military. Nonetheless, in June of 1956 he received a draft notice and passed his Army physical, and, some weeks later, he reported for basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. He showed up drunk and angry. After a few weeks of boot camp, he wrote to his parents, "We'll leave this business of being a professional soldier to the other jerks who can't make a living doing honest work." By the end of the training period, he had changed his mind. He applied to Officer Candidate School and was accepted, and, in September, 1957, wrote to his parents, "I consider this a million-dollar experience. . . . For the first time in my life I feel I have a direction, a goal, and something worth working for." Alyce was pregnant, and they were both enjoying their independence from their families. In January, Thompson wrote to his parents:

Thompson receiving a green beret during Operation Homecoming, in 1973; reunited, back home, with Alyce and his children.

LEFT: U.S. NAVY

> You wouldn't believe the difference in Alyce when she is away from her people. She has never been happier or more pleasant. Pregnancy really brought out the true beauty of her. . . . Gone is the suspicion and the foul language and the nasty temper bred in the miserable atmosphere she has known all her life. In its place is a truly wonderful girl with the sweetest disposition and the kindest nature possible. I sincerely believe there isn't another couple as happily married as Alyce and I.

When Thompson was told that he was being held back for additional training, he was keenly disappointed. "It about killed Jim that he didn't graduate with that first O.C.S. class," Alyce recalled. Finally, Thompson received his commission, but early fitness reports about him were mixed. His superiors commended him for his "bright quick mind" and his "energy and enthusiasm," but they also noted that he sometimes exercised poor judgment "in the absence of orders."

Having received his commission, Thompson entered training as a Ranger at Fort Benning, Georgia. In February of 1958, Alyce gave birth to their first child, a daughter, Pam. In July, 1960, Thompson was ordered to South Korea, for a tour of thirteen months. Alyce was pregnant again. "I began to get fed up with the Army," Alyce, a blunt-spoken woman, who is now sixty-six, told me. "Jim was to leave in June, and the baby was due in September. I asked him to hold off until the baby was born. No, he said, he had to go."

In South Korea, Thompson did well as the lieutenant of a rifle platoon—"outstanding in every respect," his reviewing officer wrote. When he returned home, in August, 1961, he and Alyce moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, with Pam and their second daughter, Laura. Alyce soon became pregnant again. Thompson, who was now a recruiting officer, had not been present at the births of his first two children, and Alyce was eager to have him there for the third. But, as the due date approached, he went on a recruiting trip. The baby, Ruth, barely survived the delivery, and when Thompson finally arrived at the hospital, Alyce recalled, he had "a Daiquiri hidden in his coat."

To meet the requirements of new military missions in Southeast Asia, President Kennedy had ordered an expansion of the Special Forces, or Green Berets. Most ambitious young officers thought that service in this maverick branch of the Army would sidetrack their advancement, and when Thompson was ordered to report to a Special Forces training program he tried, unsuccessfully, to have the orders changed. As it turned out, he prospered in his new assignment. He was promoted to captain, and, in a letter of commendation from his commanding officer, he was cited for having the "flexibility, imagination, initiative and drive so vital to a Special Forces officer."

But Thompson's home life was becoming increasingly turbulent. On Christmas Eve, 1962, he got drunk and told Alyce that his first love was the Army. "Things changed for me right then and there," she told me. Six months later, Thompson volunteered for duty in Vietnam. Alyce found out that she was pregnant with their fourth child, and she pleaded with him to stay home until after the birth. Thompson insisted on going. "That was the story of our life after Jim entered the service," she said. "He lived and breathed the Army."

Thompson left for Southeast Asia on December 26, 1963, as the commander of a team of twelve men. Their destination was Khe Sanh, the northernmost Special Forces outpost in the rugged highlands of South Vietnam, about ten kilometres from the Laotian border. He and his team were assigned to help intercept the flow of matériel and block guerrilla activity along the Vietcong supply routes that ran from Laos to the coast. They were also there to win the allegiance of the local tribespeople, the Montagnards, who lived in key mountain and jungle areas where the Vietcong were establishing bases.

Thompson's commanding officer, Colonel George Maloney, found him to be "the most eager, conscientious, anxious-to-please guy who ever came to Vietnam." But he was troubled by Thompson's naïveté. "He was totally inexperienced," Maloney told me. "He didn't know much about the area, about the V.C., about the command, or about the Montagnards." He added, "Jim was not a welleducated man—not a big-picture man."

A month after his arrival at Khe Sanh, Thompson wrote to his parents:

> The countryside is beautiful. . . . Just down the road is a coffee plantation owned by a wealthy Frenchman. Banana trees grow right in our compound. In nearby jungles, oranges, lemons and grapefruit grow in abundance. . . .
>
> Getting along with these people is perhaps the most important part of the job. Therefore I will go to almost any length to do so. I spend a great deal of time in the local villages. My medics treat their sick as well as our own. We distribute rice to keep them from starving. . . .
>
> Right now I am sitting outside my building watching the sun go down over the hills. The sight is beautiful. All is so peaceful and serene you would hardly know there is a war going on except for the troops walking guard.

Alyce, despite her dismay at her husband's departure, sent him daily letters. On January 17th, she wrote:

> Honey, I just looked at the calendar, and the baby is due in eight and a half weeks. And in almost ten weeks, half your tour will be up. As far as the girls forgetting who their Daddy is, not a chance. They tell your pictures goodnight every night and also in their prayers they say, "Please keep our Daddy safe." The two older ones keep asking when you'll be home. They miss you very much.

On March 26, 1964, an Air Force observation plane arrived at Thompson's camp to deliver the team payroll. Thompson went aboard for a quick reconnaissance of the outlying area, searching for signs of Vietcong activity. Spotting what appeared to be a footbridge, he asked the pilot, Captain Richard Whitesides, to descend into the valley for a closer look. When they dropped below the ridgeline, small-arms fire struck the aircraft, sending it into a dive. A bullet grazed Thompson's cheek. The plane hit the ground and exploded. Thompson was thrown free of the wreckage.

In the interview with Tomlinson, Thompson described his capture:

> V.C. guerrillas found the crash. I regained consciousness when one of them grabbed my hand. He had a knife and was about to slice my finger off to get at my birthstone ring, a ruby. I got the ring off myself and handed it to him. They'd already stripped me of weapons and everything I had in my pockets. . . . I was tied to a litter and carried down the mountain. When I regained consciousness, that night or the next, I was tied spread-eagle to the floor of a Montagnard hut.

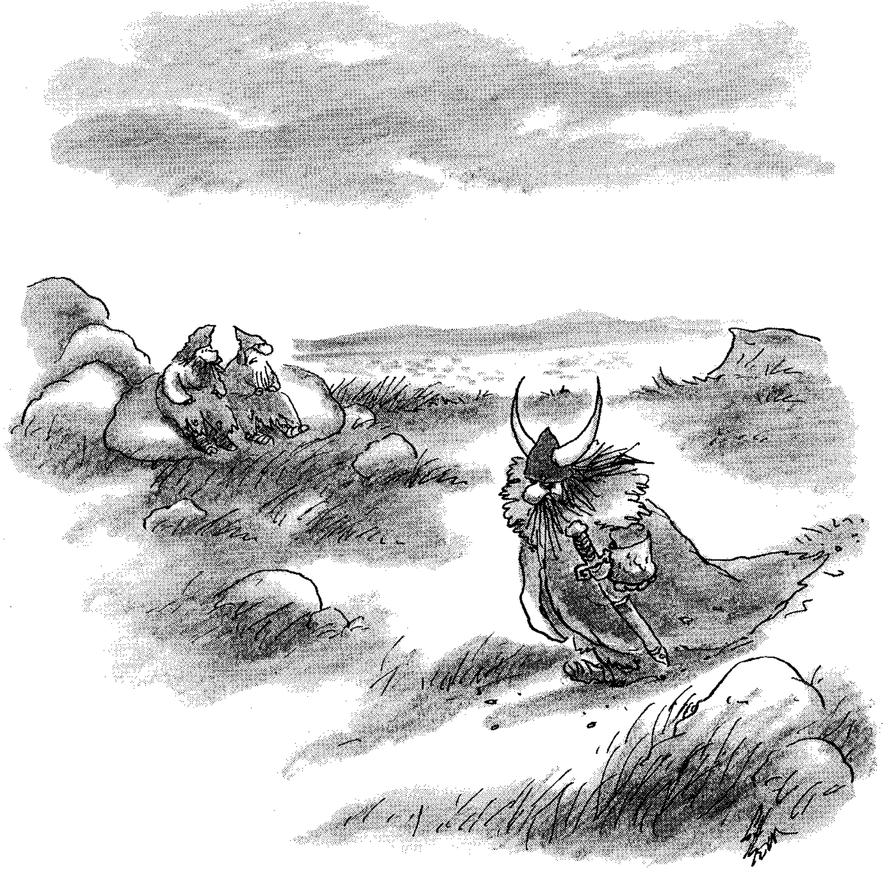
The Army ordered an immediate, intensive search of the area, but found no trace of Thompson, Whitesides, or the plane.

On the morning of March 27th, an Army chaplain visited Alyce to break the news of her husband's disappearance. Alyce, who was ten days overdue, collapsed and quickly went into labor. Thompson had often spoken of wanting a son, and that evening his wife gave birth to a boy, Jim, Jr.

During the first weeks of Thompson's captivity, the Vietcong moved him from camp to camp. For more than a month, he was unable to feed himself because of his injuries. His captors kept him alive on rice gruel, treated his wounds, and gave him penicillin. His back was so badly damaged that he couldn't walk. With great effort, he began to wiggle his toes and stretch his limbs. Gradually, he recovered the ability to stand. By June, he was able to gather wood for a fire and make his own meals. His captors told him that the National Liberation Front never maltreated prisoners of war, but he did not feel reassured. "I was in mental anguish over my family, particularly about what had happened to my wife and baby," he recalled. "When were the Vietcong going to put the pressure on me? Before my capture, I had heard of all kinds of atrocities at the hands of the Communists. Then one morning I woke up at peace. I knew that the baby had been born. I knew that it was a boy. I knew that both Alyce and the child were doing fine. And I knew that I would survive."

In June, two interrogators arrived in the camp. Both of them spoke excellent English. Initially, they presented themselves as teachers. "They began with the history of Vietnam, going back some five thousand years and moving forward through the Mongol invasions and various other conflicts," Thompson recalled. "They told me what a grand and glorious tradition the Vietnamese people had, fighting for independence and freedom. The lectures lasted four to eight hours a day. They said that, as soon as I understood their side of the war, I would be allowed to go."

After six weeks, however, their tactics changed. The interrogators kept Thompson awake until he was exhausted, fed him meagrely, and restricted his smok-



"I've noticed that our tax system tends to favor bigger, meaner citizens."

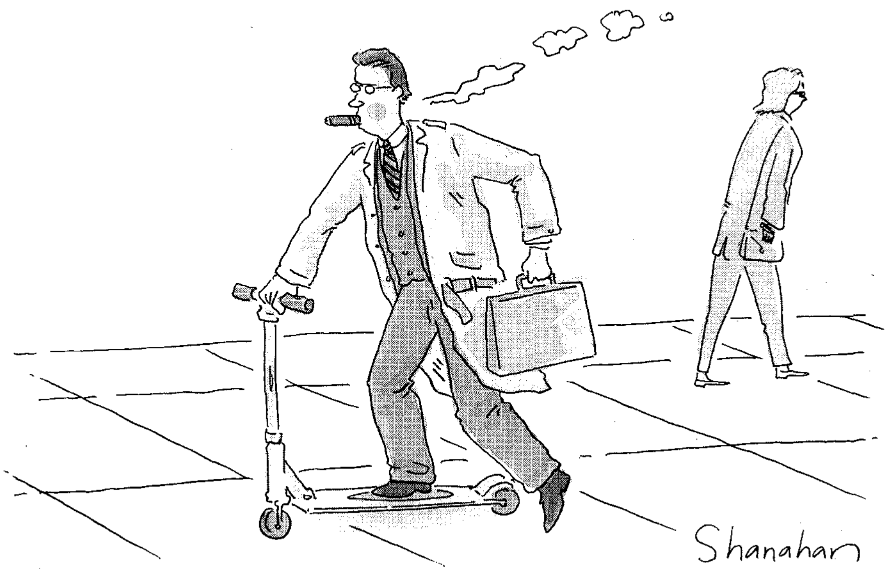
ing. "Their method was to alter the pressure," Thompson said. "If you put pressure on somebody and hold it on, he can learn to live with it. But alternating a hard day with an easy day causes mental pressure to build up." Thompson still had a great deal of back pain, and being forced to sit through long interrogations was "pure torture." He had also contracted malaria and dysentery.

During Thompson's first month of captivity, he made three attempts to escape, simply walking away from his guards when they fell asleep or were distracted. Each time, after travelling a short distance, he came upon other guards, signalled that he had to defecate, and was returned to his hut. On his fourth attempt, Thompson left a dozing guard outside his hut one morning, encountered no other guards, and kept walking. Late in the afternoon, he came to a river.

"I was free," he recalled. "Even the air seemed different—just breathing without a guard over my shoulder. I had visions of a big beer bust in the club at Da Nang. I would call home and tell my wife that I was all right. I would find out I had a son. I thought what a relief it would be to hear Alyce's voice. Then I'd get back to where the V.C. had held me and clean their clock."

At dusk, he decided to cross the river, and he was knee-deep in water when he was spotted by a group of Montagnards who were friendly to the Vietcong. They lit torches and screamed at Thompson. A Vietcong soldier appeared and fired at him. He was captured and taken back to the camp, where the commander had him tied up and beaten until he lost consciousness.

During the next month, the interrogations became more severe, and he was deprived of food, sleep, and warm clothing. "The pressure now got as high as it could without killing me," he recalled. "I had lost forty to fifty pounds in three months. It was an effort to put one foot in front of the other. I had to move very, very slowly or I would pass out." In the third week of August, he was presented with a statement to sign. It said that the Vietcong had given him excellent medical care and had treated him kindly. It praised the N.L.F. as freedom fighters, who sought only peace, democracy, and neutrality for their country. And it called for the withdrawal of all American forces from South Vietnam.



THE FIRST JACKASS OF SPRING

"I sat there with pen in hand as they shouted at me to write," he recalled. "They altered their approach, from trying to convince me I should write to cajoling me. Periodically, they hit me with bamboo. They kept at it for eight, ten, twelve hours a day. I would almost lose touch with reality. When I finally signed the thing, it was as if I were standing to the side, watching myself do it. As soon as I signed it, the pressure stopped. The next day, they brought me back and told me to rewrite the statement in my own handwriting and sign it. Which I did. Then they put a microphone in front of me and said, 'Read it.' And I read it."

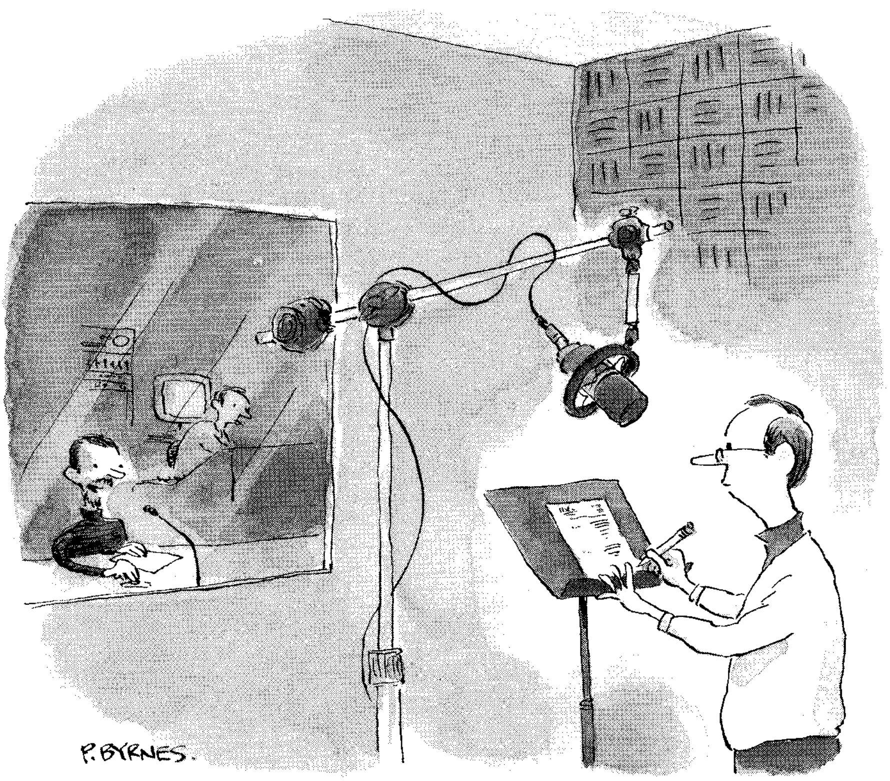
For the next six months, Thompson was left alone. "I spent most of my time in a bamboo hut, six foot square, with absolutely nothing to do," he recalled. "A guard sat out front. If I had to leave, I asked permission. I could go down to the creek and wash or go to the latrine. If I needed wood, the guard handed me an axe and told me to go cut it. No reading material. Nothing to write with.

"I invented all manner of things to pass the time. One was building houses. I knew enough to come up with some reasonable designs. I started off remodelling houses that I had lived in, then designing and building new ones. Everything in the plan had to be absolutely perfect. I computed the number of board feet of lumber and the exact number of bricks I needed. All the fixtures, the electrical wiring, the plumbing. I had to be accurate down to the penny.

"About the fifth house I designed was our dream house. It had five bedrooms. The master bedroom had a walk-in dressing room. Twin bathrooms, mine just a stall shower. My wife's bathroom had a tub and built-in vanity. There was a boy's room—I knew with certainty that I had a son now. There was an L-shaped living room with space for a grand piano; a dining room; and a large kitchen. A full-sized basement with game room and bar. A workshop plus a big two-car garage."

Thompson also built an imaginary church where he could worship on Sundays with his family. "I called it our Chapel in the Sky," he said. "I pictured a small rustic chapel sitting on a cloud. It had stained-glass windows, very large ones, behind the altar. The inside was knotty pine and natural-finished oak. There was a red rug on the floor, red upholstered cushions on the benches. The chapel had an organ and a small choir. The altar had a simple cross, similar to the one in my home-town church."

In May of 1964, the Army sent a telegram to Alyce Thompson, informing her that a Vietcong defector had spoken about a wounded American who had been captured by the Vietcong after the



"Great! O.K., this time I want you to sound taller, and let me hear a little more hair."

• •

downing of a plane. The prisoner's whereabouts were unknown. The telegram went on to assure her that a "concentrated search" was under way, and leaflets offering a reward were being distributed.

Alyce continued writing her husband daily letters. "Then all of the letters came back in one fell swoop," she recalled. "The Army told me not to bother writing anymore. It was just more work for them sending the letters back." As an officer's wife, who was bringing up four children on her own, Alyce had come to depend on the support of the close-knit community on the base. But now she was beginning to feel isolated. A new commanding officer and his wife had arrived at Fort Bragg, and she was no longer receiving invitations to post functions. "I bothered her," she said of the C.O.'s wife. "More men were training and leaving for six-month increments. With my husband already missing, she didn't want that spoiling her parties. The others might think, God, this could happen to me!"

Alyce and a friend whose husband was also missing in action had taken up bowling under the tutelage of a sergeant who ran the base's bowling alley. A divorced father, with custody of his two children, he was sympathetic to Alyce's situation, and the two of them gradually slipped into an affair. "Harold"—not his real name—"was a friend, that's all it started out to be," Alyce said. "Just a friend, and we got close. He was a very caring person."

In November, a neighbor called Alyce and told her that she had just heard Jim's voice on the New York radio station WABC, reading a statement. "I've been praying for this for seven months," Alyce told a reporter for the Fayetteville *Observer.* "Now my prayers have been answered." But the reports of Thompson's statement further isolated Alyce and her children, and they began to feel shunned. "I never had another friend after that," her oldest daughter, Pam, recalled. "Parents kept their kids away from me."

In the spring of 1965, Harold announced that he was retiring from the Army and moving, with his children, to Massachusetts. He asked Alyce to join him. "I was twenty-nine, at the peak of life, with four kids," she recalled, looking back on that period. "Yet I was expected to sit in a goddam rocking chair with a prayer book and wait. For my own sanity and for the sake of my kids, I wasn't going to do that."

She notified the Army that she was leaving Fort Bragg, and she gave a new address to which her husband's paychecks should be sent. "Harold would be a father image for my kids and I would be a mother image for his," she said. "That's the way we explained it to ourselves."

In November of 1966, Thompson was moved to a camp in a rain forest. His food ration was reduced, and he lost even more weight. The camp's commander seemed to take delight in his misery. Whenever Thompson asked for more food, the commander laughed. He would stand in front of Thompson and throw rice on the ground for chickens to eat, then look at Thompson and smile.

"The hut they built for me wasn't fit for a dog," Thompson recalled. "It was cut into the side of a steep bank at ground level next to a creek bed. The sides were a latticework of palm. It rained all the time. I never had enough clothing. No blanket. I wasn't permitted a fire. My guards had a warm, dry place, twenty feet higher, and always a good fire, for which they forced me to cut wood."

The following summer, an N.L.F. cadre arrived to take Thompson to North Vietnam. The journey required twenty days of walking along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Before the trip, he was given meat and condensed milk to build up his strength. After the journey began, he received proper medical attention, for the first time in more than three years of captivity. On August 20, 1967, he arrived at a new camp—a village of about two hundred buildings that had been constructed as a civilian prison.

"I was put into a small cell, infested with flies, mosquitoes, and all manner of crawling things," he recalled. "I had no mosquito netting. I was handcuffed, placed in leg irons, blindfolded, and left to lie on this board. Periodically, I was taken into an office where an interrogator began with a lecture. He told me I was a criminal, not a prisoner of war. I deserved to be shot for untold crimes against the Vietnamese people. That sadistic devil tortured me every day for two weeks.

"He had the guard tie my elbows behind my back until they touched. They attached a rope to my elbows and threw it over a ceiling beam and hoisted me up. This forced my arms back even farther, causing excruciating pain on my breastbone. I felt my chest would split open. Thankfully, I had contracted dysentery and was extremely weak. As soon as they put pressure on the ropes, I lost consciousness. I'd be revived, and they'd start again. Finally, the commander got disgusted and tried hanging me by my thumbs. That didn't work, either."

On September 1st, Thompson was moved to a camp farther north. He was chained and put in a cage so small that he couldn't sit up or stretch out. He was let out for fifteen minutes a day to relieve himself and wash, and, occasionally, for longer periods of interrogation. "The leg irons were a nasty device, a U-bolt with a rusted rod through the back, much too small for American legs," he recalled. "Every time they put the thing on, it took a chunk of flesh." He was kept in the cage for four months.

One day, several high-ranking officials paid him a visit. "They took the irons off and told me that I must bow to them, salute, and show respect. Because I refused, I was starved and denied water for three days. On the evening of the third day, they dragged me out of the cage, knocked me to my knees, and beat me with fists and clubs. They put a length of gauze tape around my throat as a garrote to strangle me. All the time, they shouted and yelled in Vietnamese. They were telling me I was very stubborn and belligerent. Then the camp commander gave me a lesson on how to bow to the Vietnamese cadre. He kicked me in the belly and, grabbing a handful of hair, banged my head on the dirt floor. He did this repeatedly until I passed out. I'd be revived, and he'd do it again."

Alyce and Harold and the children had moved into a comfortable house in the Boston suburb of Hudson. The house had four bedrooms, and there was a swimming pool in the back yard. Harold got a job as a civilian chef at a nearby government facility, and he and Alyce passed themselves off as a married couple. Alyce wore a gold wedding band, and if neighbors asked why her children had a different last name she said that their father was dead. Everyone in the new extended family got along well, except Pam, who kept her distance from Harold.

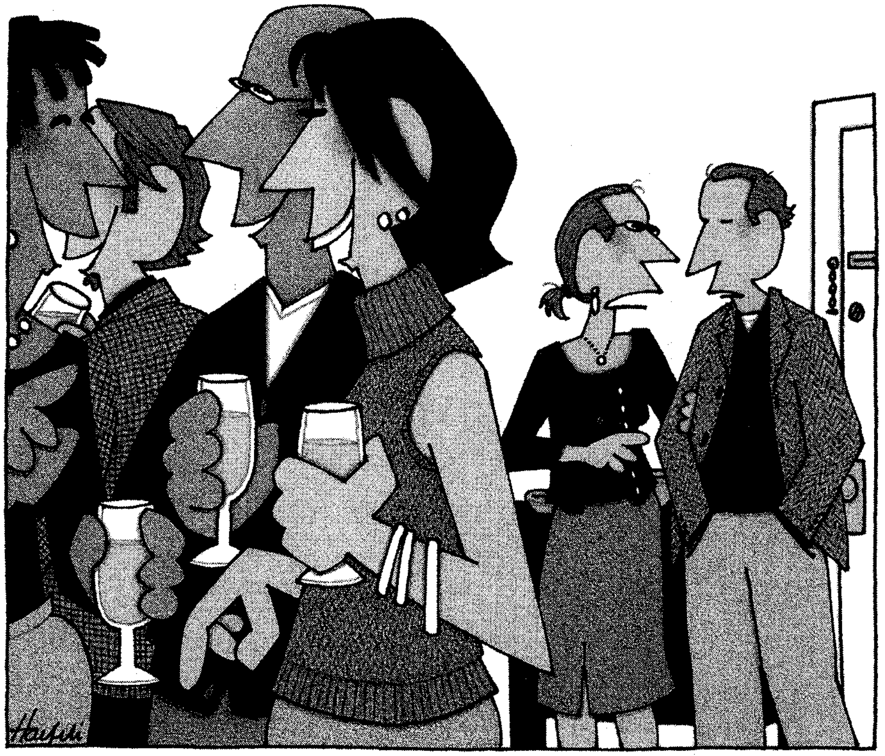
"I had been my dad's favorite before he left for Vietnam," she told me, "so I remembered him going to work, helping us take a bath, getting us ready for school." She added, "My first fight with Harold was over my father. I asked Mama if I could have a picture of Daddy. Harold took a fit. He didn't want pictures of 'that man' in the house. I got mad. That night, Mama gave me a photograph of him and said that I could keep it in my drawer somewhere."

Every month, the Army sent Alyce a letter assuring her that "every reasonable effort" was being made to find her husband. Nevertheless, by the summer of 1965 she had persuaded herself that he was dead, killed in Vietnam "by a rattlesnake," she told the children. "I thought the Army would soon declare Jim dead, and Harold and I could marry, start a life—a legitimate life," she said. Then, in August, the Army asked her to listen to the recording of the statement that Thompson had reportedly made in captivity. A major arrived with the tape, and, after listening to it three times, Alyce emphatically identified the voice as her husband's. But a few minutes later, as the officer was leaving, she modified her statement, saying that she couldn't be sure. "My worst fear," she explained, "was that I would be found out and my kids would get hurt. I felt my world ready to crumble down around my ears."

Shortly before Christmas, 1967, Thompson was transferred from the cage to a walled cell three feet wide and six feet long. For a Christmas present, the guards removed his chains and gave him a "tree," in the form of a pine branch, which he decorated with scraps of paper. The sight of it, he said, was so pathetic that he broke down in tears. "I thought a great deal about Christmas while in prison," he recalled. "It had always been a very precious time for my wife and me. I thought about how Alyce would be celebrating Christmas, having to do it by herself."

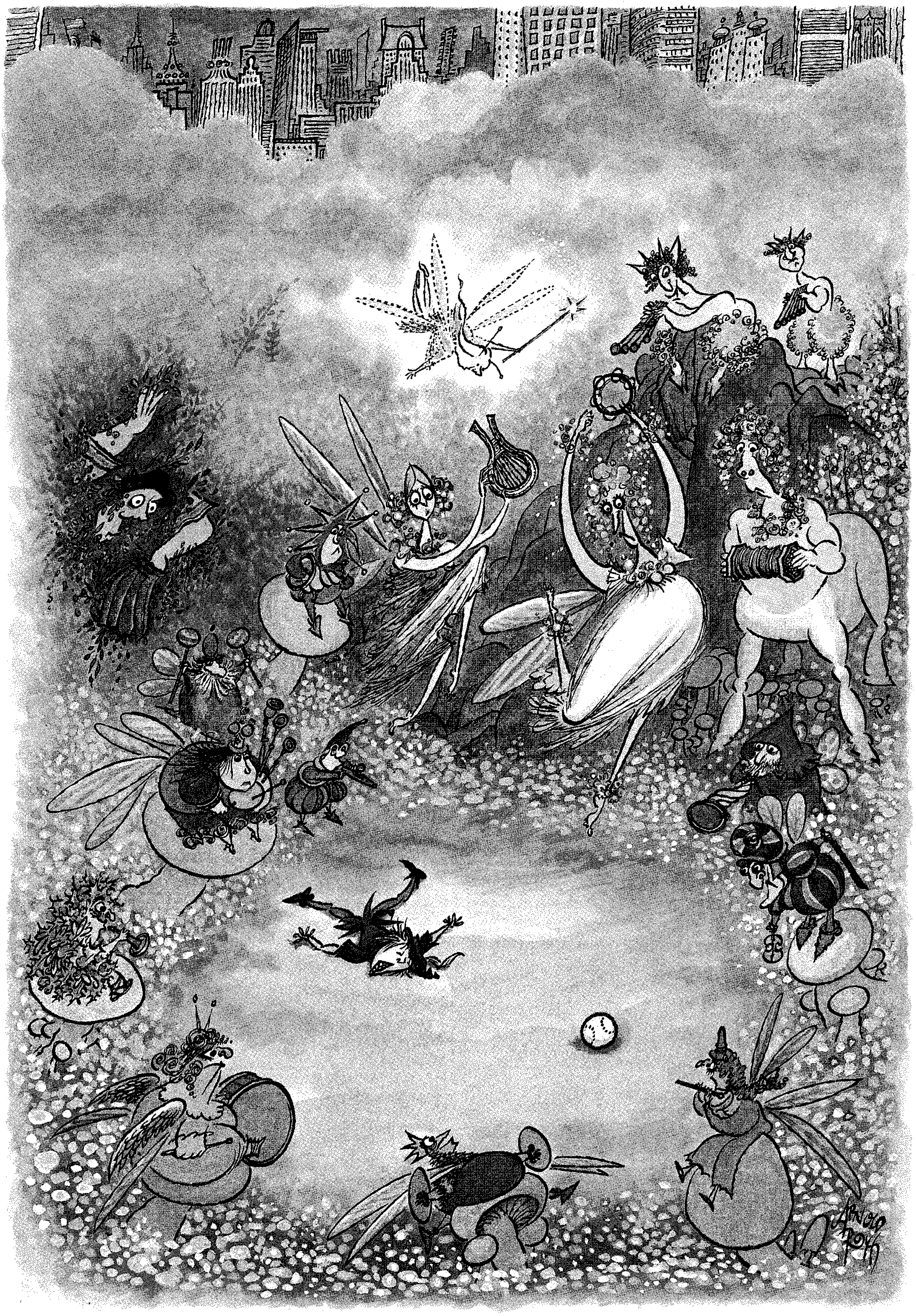
Thompson celebrated Christmas Eve by singing Christmas carols in his mind, ending with "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." The next day, his captors treated him to his first decent meal in nearly four years—broiled chicken, pork with sweet-and-sour sauce, and salad. He was given a shot of rum and some candy. He ate as much as he could, and then he vomited.

In January of 1968, the Communist



"Relax. You're a famous author—no one expects you to talk about anything other than yourself."

SKETCHBOOK BY ARNOLD ROTH


ARNOLD ROTH

forces launched the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam. During the next two months, nearly nine thousand American and South Vietnamese soldiers and more than fifty-eight thousand Vietcong and North Vietnamese soldiers died. Small groups of Americans, both civilian and military, were captured in the city of Hué and taken to Thompson's prison camp. They were the first Americans to see Thompson in four years. When one of them, a warrant officer named Mike O'Connor, got a glimpse into Thompson's cell one morning, he thought he was looking at a corpse that the guards had put there as a cruel joke. Then he saw Thompson move. "He looked like something out of Auschwitz," O'Connor recalled. "I didn't know how he stood up, how he breathed, how he did anything. His features were so distorted. Later, when we could wash up together, I could literally see his entire skeleton and the balls of his joints around his knees and elbows." O'Connor was astonished to hear Thompson engaging in arguments with the guards: "They wanted him to see the error of his ways, and he threw it right back at them. He never gave in."

During a group indoctrination session that summer, Thompson went into convulsions. Guards ordered O'Connor and another prisoner to carry him back to his cell. A few days later, he was seen shuffling along, and his speech was incoherent. Eventually, Thompson learned that he had suffered a heart seizure, brought on by starvation, and that a prison medic had saved him with a shot of adrenaline. Some days later, the North Vietnamese marched him and several other American prisoners north, to another prison camp. On July 7th, they arrived at an old monastery on the outskirts of Hanoi. It had been used as a prison by the Japanese during the Second World War and by the French during colonial days. The Americans were kept in solitary confinement, in cells that had once belonged to monks. They nicknamed the camp Skid Row.

"Depriving us of any association with other Americans was a form of mental torture," Larry Stark, one of the prisoners, recalled. "And, hell, they did it with malice.The only person they'd provide was the interrogator. The only reading material was propaganda." Thompson remained in solitary confinement for nine more months. Then, on April 1, 1969, he was moved into a cell with three other Americans—Stark, Lew Meyer, and Chuck Willis, all of whom had come to Vietnam as civilian employees of the United States government.

Thompson, who had not exchanged more than a few words with another American for five years, spoke little at first. Finally, he asked the others about life back home. He was shocked by what he heard. "I had dismissed what the interrogators told me"—about American antiwar activities—"as propaganda, as garbage," he said. "Coming from fellow-Americans, it was hard to take. I could understand the radical element, people who are against anything and everything. But when I heard of congressmen, senators, educators, professional people who had taken an antiwar stand, I couldn't conceive of it."

Meyer, who bunked next to Thompson, encouraged him to build back his strength through a regimen of exercises. Even after a month of deep breathing, stretching, and bending, Thompson couldn't do a pushup. But he gradually got stronger, and, after several months, he was able to do twelve repetitions of the Army's "daily dozen" without pause, and as many as a hundred situps and eighty-seven pushups. "Jim was not athletic," Meyer told me. "He didn't know anything about football or baseball. Frankly, he didn't seem like the kind of guy to go Ranger or Green Beret. All he was was guts and heart."

Some nights, Meyer and the others were awakened by terrible screams from Thompson's bunk. Meyer would get out of bed and untangle Thompson from the blanket and mosquito netting in which he had wrapped himself during the nightmare. Then he would walk him around the cell, telling him, "You're safe now. You're safe."

Thompson and his cellmates had increasingly heated arguments about the legitimacy of America's involvement in the war. Along with Meyer, he felt strongly that the Americans were "fighting for the freedom of an oppressed people and, indirectly, for our own way of life." Willis and Stark questioned whether America belonged in Vietnam. Finally, Thompson could no longer tolerate their views, and he persuaded the guards to put him and Meyer in a separate cell.

Meyer worried about the picture of home life that Thompson had created for himself. "He talked of a dream car—a Pontiac convertible—and a dream house," Meyer recalled. "Alyce could do no wrong. I'd nod while Jim told his stories, but I felt that he was setting himself up for a big letdown."

In Hudson, Alyce and Harold added a family room with a fireplace to the house, and put in a larger kitchen. "I figured I'd be here for the rest of my life," she told me. As news of the Paris peace talks between the United States and North Vietnam intensified, so did public concern for the estimated thirteen hundred and twenty-five Americans listed as P.O.W.s or missing in action in Vietnam. In the fall of 1969, the Army told Alyce about the formation of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, but she asked that her name be withheld from the group's roster. She told her Army family-assistance officer that she did not want Thompson's name released for any reason, and she asked a civilian lawyer for advice on how to have him declared legally dead. The lawyer told her that such an action was not possible as long as Thompson was officially a P.O.W. "My blood pressure went sky-high," Alyce recalled. "Harold and I discussed the possibility that if anything came out in the press about us we'd have to move out of the neighborhood, probably out of the state."

In March, 1971, when the National League of Families asked the Army for Alyce's permission to use her husband's name on posters designed to draw attention to the plight of American P.O.W.s, she replied, "His name will be released to no one, and, if it is, there will be hell to pay."

On June 21, 1971, Thompson and thirteen other prisoners, including Meyer and Stark, were moved to a newly built camp near Hanoi. The prison building stood in a rectangular courtyard encircled by a sixteen-foot stone wall. After two months, the prisoners were let out of the building to exercise and to build a volleyball court. They raked dirt and moved rocks, and they dubbed the place the Rockpile.

As the senior of just two military

men among the fourteen prisoners, Thompson felt that he should assume command. But the civilian prisoners balked at this, and they chose one of their own, Larry Stark, to represent them with their captors. Stark had great regard for Thompson. Jim was ready "to take command if we would allow him," he told me. "But, because he was so rigid in terms of what information we should give and to what extent we could cooperate, some didn't want to go along. I respected Jim for his attitude and demeanor and military bearing. Throughout the confinement, he maintained his decorum and presence as an officer. All the prisoners, even those not particularly fond of Jim, agreed with that. He was consistent and persistent. He taught us all to play bridge—a big contribution to our sanity. And, though very serious most of the time, he had a good sense of humor. He could even produce a genuine horse laugh once in a while."

The North Vietnamese subjected the Americans to constant propaganda lectures. "They showed us antiwar statements attributed to prominent Americans," Thompson recalled. " 'This is what the real American people think,' they said. 'You should be loyal to the American people, not to traitors in the government.' One photo they showed us was of Dr. Spock at a rally in Washington. There were others, of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Looking at the type of people protesting only reinforced our conviction that this was a radical element, not the American majority. By far the most discouraging statements were attributed to the Democratic Party platform during the '72 election. They made us sick: guaranteed amnesty for draft dodgers; total pullout from Southeast Asia within ninety days. Something like that could cause someone to crumple up in disgust."

On October 1st, Thompson, Meyer, and another, much older prisoner, Speed Adkins, made a bold attempt to escape. Using a makeshift ladder, they climbed over the wall and dropped into the dense surrounding jungle. It took them several hours to travel only a hundred yards. They finally reached an open, swampy area, and, by pre-arrangement, split up. Thompson and Meyer set off toward Laos; Adkins headed east. Soaked by heavy rain, Thompson and Meyer hid in a farmer's shed until morning, then moved on. Before long, they arrived at the outskirts of their prison camp. They had come full circle. Making their way back along the trail, they were surrounded by search parties, fired upon, and taken back to their cells. Adkins, too, was recaptured. They were not tortured, but the quality of their food deteriorated, and their requests for reading material and basic medical treatment were denied. For the next year, none of the American P.O.W.s were allowed outside the prison building.

"Those aren't buzzards, are they?"

In December, 1971, the Army informed Alyce of new evidence that her husband had survived the plane crash: a North Vietnamese doctor who had been captured three years earlier said that he had treated an American P.O.W. The prisoner had identified himself as Captain Thompson. Three months later, after a complete list of known P.O.W.s was published in the *Congressional Record,* an editorial in the San Diego *Union* took note of the eighth anniversary of Thompson's disappearance:

> International rules of conduct, codified in the Geneva Convention on proper treatment of prisoners of war, require that Captain Thompson be accorded many rights, including decent treatment, periodic verification of his condition by neutral observers, and mail and packages at regular intervals. He is also entitled to be sent to the United States if he is either wounded or ill. He has been accorded none of these rights.

On January 23, 1973, President Nixon announced that the United States had reached an agreement in Paris that would bring "peace with honor" to Southeast Asia. Within sixty days, the United States would withdraw its remaining combat forces of twenty-three thousand seven hundred soldiers from South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese agreed to release all their American prisoners of war, of whom there were, they said, fewer than six hundred.

Several days later, Alyce got a phone call from the Army: her husband was alive and returning home. She gave Harold the news first, and she told the children when they got home from school. Pam, elated, fetched the hidden photograph from her bedroom; it was the only picture of Thompson in the house. It showed him in his uniform, with his three little daughters, all in yellow dresses. "I didn't know what to do," Jim, Jr., who was nearly nine, recalled. "It was, like, Hey, forget him"—meaning Harold—"*that's* the one." TV reporters began showing up at the front door. Alyce refused to speak to them.

On February 12th, Operation Homecoming began, with the arrival of the first group of P.O.W.s at Clark Air Base, in the Philippines. Thompson was not among them. When Lieutenant Alvarez, the Navy pilot, stepped off the plane, commentators hailed him as the war's longest-held American prisoner. Alyce's family-assistance officer, Ted Johansson, who watched the event on television, knew that the accolade was misplaced. "It seemed strange that the Army let the Navy push Alvarez instead of Jim," he told me. "But our main objective was to protect the Thompson family. That was the directive from the Pentagon."

Thompson's captivity ended on March 16th, when he and thirty-one other P.O.W.s were put aboard a flight from Hanoi to the Philippines. He had defied his captors until the end, leading a hunger strike in his last camp, the so-called Hanoi Hilton, on behalf of a prisoner who had been captured the day of the Paris agreement and whose name was not on the list of returning P.O.W.s. Recalling the moment when he boarded an American plane for the flight out of Vietnam, Thompson said, "I felt like a spring that's been under tension too damn long. Wound too tight. Just numb. I didn't believe it, didn't fully realize what was happening. I was in a fog."

At Clark Air Base, he and the other P.O.W.s were welcomed with a red carpet, an honor guard, and speeches, and then somebody started singing "God Bless America." One of the prisoners, a Special Forces sergeant named Don MacPhail, remembered the occasion: "Jim and I looked at each other, put our arms around each other, and that was it. We lost it. I thought, It's all coming out now. Jesus, all the years of not crying, all the years of just taking it."

Alyce was waiting for Thompson when he arrived at Valley Forge General Hospital, in Pennsylvania. She said that they needed to talk, alone, and she told him how she and the children had been living during the past nine years. Afterward, he said, "I think we can overcome this and start over." Alyce needed time to think about it. That night, she stayed up late and made her decision: she would return to her husband. "Not because I loved him," she explained later. "I didn't. I was repulsed by his appearance, and I was hurt by what he had caused to happen to our lives in the last nine years. I would go back to him because of the kids. I thought that they would be happier back with their father."

SHOWING
NOW SHOWING
B. Smaller

"Let's wait for it to come out on cable and then not watch it."

• •

The next day, Thompson met his children. Ruth held back. "I was scared—he was a stranger," she recalled. But the others greeted him effusively. Jim, Jr., who Thompson thought was the "spitting image" of himself as a boy, jumped into his father's arms with such force that Thompson fell down.

When Thompson insisted that Alyce introduce him to Harold and show him the house where she and the children had been living—he said later that he simply "wanted to look"—she reluctantly took him to Hudson. Thompson asked that Ted Johansson come, too, and, according to Johansson, Thompson introduced Harold as "the man who had looked after his family."

"It was very tense," Alyce recalled, but "there were no harsh words. Jim was too much of a gentleman to hit Harold." Alyce described her parting with Harold as "emotional." But she felt certain that she was doing the right thing. "I knew it was breaking up a home," she told me. "But I had to give living with Jim a chance. I didn't want my four kids coming back to me later and saying, 'Why didn't you?' Or even myself saying, 'Maybe I should have.'"

Among veterans' groups and at Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions Club gatherings, Thompson was in great demand as a speaker about his Vietnam experiences. "He gave a tremendous pitch," Dan Rickard, a colonel who was close to Thompson at the time, recalled. "Listeners wound up with tears in their eyes and giving Jim a standing ovation." He received a letter from President Nixon, praising him for "a strength of faith, patience and patriotism which can never be fully comprehended by others." Two months later, he was among five hundred former P.O.W.s who were honored guests at the White House.

Toward the end of his captivity, Thompson had been promoted to major, and now he was promoted to lieutenant colonel. He was assigned for advanced training to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, where he was expected only to monitor classes. In the spring of 1974, in the nearby suburb of Columbus, he found his "dream house"—a split-level with six bedrooms. "Our bedroom was pink," Alyce recalled. "More Jim's idea than mine. He saw a hot-pink carpet he wanted. He had hot-pink valances made, pink satin drapes, and a white satin brocade bedspread. It was swank."

Thompson began to attend church, and he insisted that his children, who had had no experience of churchgoing during his absence, go with him. In April, 1973, he returned to his boyhood church, in New Jersey, and, in an address to the congregation, he identified the three things that had enabled him to survive his captivity: "faith in God, the conviction that we were doing a job that had to be done, and a wonderful family to come home to."

But Thompson couldn't forgive Alyce's unfaithfulness. Moreover, he disapproved of the way she had brought up the children. He criticized their table manners and the freedom with which they dressed and spoke. He insisted that they call him "sir" and their mother "madam." And he couldn't abide Alyce's independence. "While my dad was gone," Ruth told me, "women's rights became a big thing, and Mama changed along with everyone else. She learned not to follow behind a man like a puppy dog. So the two of them argued about things like who would start a fire in the fireplace." According to Laura, her parents made no attempt to disguise their unhappiness: "These were full-blown fights where Ruthie and I would hold on to each other thinking, My God, someone's going to die tonight. I didn't want to come home after school."

One day, Laura appeared in jeans with a peace patch on one of the pockets, and Thompson went into a rage. He grabbed her violently, tore the patch off the jeans, and walked out of the house. Alyce found him in a bar. "Laura had always been such a sweet girl," Alyce told me. "After that, she was never the same. Soon she was getting mixed up with drugs and going downhill."

The Army chaplain at Fort Benning, Sterling Wetherell, who was also the family pastor, felt that the Thompsons were on "an emotional roller coaster—euphoria at one point, absolute depression at the next." Thompson, he recalled, wanted to get close to his children but couldn't: "He was totally out of touch. He wasn't able to control events in his own family, so he became more and more disillusioned. The freedoms and liberties he saw the children exhibit were not part of his own youth. He couldn't bridge that gap." Both Thompson and Alyce, Wetherell noticed, were drinking heavily.

Thompson was also increasingly disillusioned about changes in the Army. "Jim couldn't understand," Wetherell said. " 'How come soldiers have longer hair, and act and behave the way they do?' he asked. They no longer kept their uniform properly, and didn't act with military bearing. Discipline was not as brisk. Jim saw the changes as a personal attack."

Alyce, for her part, began to question her husband's sexuality: she had walked into the study one day and discovered him in an embrace with a young male relative of hers who was visiting. One night in June, 1974, she accused him of being homosexual. He called her a whore. She smashed a bust of Abraham Lincoln that the children had given him. He began hitting her, but when Pam and Laura ran into the room he stopped. (The two younger children were visiting relatives in Pennsylvania.) Alyce tried to get the two girls into the car, but Laura ran away. Alyce and Pam, unable to find her, left without her.

The following afternoon, Laura returned home. "Dad opened the door, obviously surprised to see me," she recalled. " 'Can I please come home?' I asked. He started to cry. I never saw such a broken-hearted man." Several weeks later, Thompson began seeing a psychiatrist at Martin Army Community Hospital, at Fort Benning, complaining of insomnia, depression, a reduced ability to concentrate, and loss of appetite.

That fall, Thompson was one of several former P.O.W.s who were invited back to Southeast Asia as honored guests of the South Vietnamese, who hoped that the trip would build public

DOOR

The cat cries for me from the other side.
It is beyond her to work this device
That I open and cross and close
With such ease when I mean to work.

Its four panels form a cross—the rood,
Sign of suffering and redemption.
The rod, a dividing pike or pale
Mounted and hinged to swing between

One way or place and another, meow.
Between the January vulva of birth
And the January of death's door
There are so many to negotiate,

Closed or flung open or ajar, valves
Of attention. O kitty, if the doors
Of perception were cleansed
All things would appear as they are,

Infinite. Come in, darling, drowse
Comfortably near my feet, I will click
The barrier closed again behind you, O
Sister will, fellow-mortal, here we are.

—*Robert Pinsky*

support for what was increasingly seen as a lost cause. One of his fellow-P.O.W.s was John McCain, the future senator and Presidential candidate. Recalling his first meeting with Thompson during that trip, McCain said, "I noticed how his hands shook and sometimes he was not articulate. I chalked it up to physical problems he had in captivity. Yet he was very courteous. In fact, Jim was almost non-military he was so friendly. But he lacked self-confidence and needed to be told what to do. He seemed a bit like Rip Van Winkle, uncomfortable about his rank and not well informed."

In November, in a special ceremony at Fort Benning, the Army awarded Thompson the Silver Star, for his attempt, in 1971, to escape from the Rockpile; the Bronze Star, for his "continuous showing of resistance to an enemy"; and the Legion of Merit, which cited the extraordinary number of years in which he had been held in solitary confinement. None of Thompson's family members were present at the event.

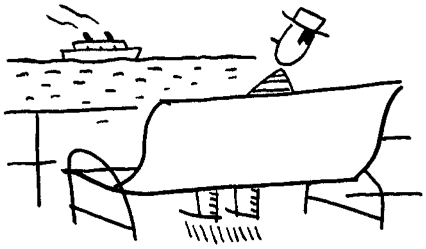
A few weeks later, Thompson, fearing that he might have suffered brain damage as a result of the plane crash or of being tortured, checked himself into the hospital for a complete psychiatric and neurological examination. According to one of the doctors who examined him, he assumed a "protective role" toward other patients and had "frequent skirmishes with the power base." One psychiatrist observed, "His self-enforced personality traits are highly adaptive to a prisoner role, yet maladaptive to this society."

Thompson and Alyce were divorced in October, 1974, and both of them remarried the following year. Alyce married a construction worker, with whom she moved to Tennessee, and Thompson married an Air Force lieutenant colonel who had arranged for him to speak at her base. She retired, and the couple moved into Thompson's house in Columbus. Thompson's new wife objected to his opulent taste, and gradually she began redecorating the house. She was also concerned about his excessive drinking, which seemed to exacerbate his severe mood swings. One day, Alyce said, she called and told her that she, too, had begun to wonder about Jim's sexual orientation.

In the fall of 1977, Thompson returned home from a weekend away and found that all the furnishings in the house, except for a few mementos from Vietnam, had been removed. Thompson called Dr. Sidney Levine, a psychologist he had been seeing in a Fort Benning alcoholic-rehabilitation program. Levine found him sitting on the floor of the empty living room, holding a drink and sobbing. "He reminded me of a helpless baby, just whipped and beaten," Levine told me. "His shock was phenomenal. It was the first time I'd seen him cry. Watching Jim on that floor, I thought, This woman has gotten to him in a way no Vietcong ever could. That house was everything to Jim, perhaps the only thing that helped him hang on."

Several weeks after Thompson's wife moved out, Levine discovered him lying in a coma, on his bed, in bachelor-officer's quarters at Fort Benning. "He was a half breath away from death," Levine recalled. "Most of his clothes were scattered over the room, although his uniform was hung neatly on a chair. I saw an empty gin bottle and a whiskey bottle on the desk. There were more pill bottles than a pharmacy. All the vials were empty. There was no doubt what had happened." Levine carried Thompson to his car and drove him to the emergency room of Martin Army Community Hospital, where he was revived.

When Thompson recovered his strength, the Army ordered him confined to the psychiatric annex of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in Forest Glen, Maryland. Thompson's psychiatrist there, Captain Batson, encouraged him not to dwell on his experiences as a P.O.W. but to examine the patterns in his life before and after his captivity. "I wanted Jim to understand things that had been conflicts for him, to deal with them rather than retreat, as he would often do, denying that they were important or painful," Batson said. "Denial had been a very effective method of coping when he was a P.O.W. It kept him alive. Now it would take him a long time to stop denying his problems with alcohol."



In 1979, Thompson joined Alcoholics Anonymous. He was promoted to full colonel, he started dating again, and three of his children, Laura, Ruth, and Jim, Jr., visited him in Washington during their summer vacations. But there were fewer and fewer calls for him to speak to veterans' groups, and he felt bitter about the fact that Americans seemed to be looking back on the Vietnam War as a national disgrace. He had the stroke in 1981, at the age of forty-seven, and a year later he retired from the Army, for medical reasons.

All Thompson's children have suffered from the effects of their father's captivity and his chaotic return, but none more than his son. In January, 1990, in Nashville, Jim, Jr., was arrested for shooting and killing a man in an argument over the ownership of a car. Thompson visited his son in jail several times and attended the trial, where Jim, Jr., was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to sixteen years in prison. He was released on parole several years ago.

Thompson, who will turn sixty-eight this summer, still lives alone in Key West. He refuses to talk to his children, but, for the past eighteen years, he has participated in the local Veterans Day parade, three times as the grand marshal. One of the few people with whom he is in regular contact is his attorney, Michael Chamowitz. "What happened to him in Vietnam defines his character," Chamowitz told me. "Vietnam taught him a lesson. It's the same one he gets every day at A.A.: if I live through today, there will be a tomorrow."

In July of 1999, an American search team discovered the place in the Vietnam highlands where Thompson's plane had been shot down, thirty-five years earlier. People in the village of A Vao, near the Da Krong River, confirmed that one person in the aircraft had been killed and the other had survived and been turned over to the Vietcong. In the jungle, the team found the frame of an aircraft seat, pieces of metal and Plexiglas, and the buckle of a seatbelt. Thompson has said that he might like to return to Vietnam one day to revisit the site of his capture. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

CRIES AND WHISPERS

How much of Edith Wharton's life is in her short stories?

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT

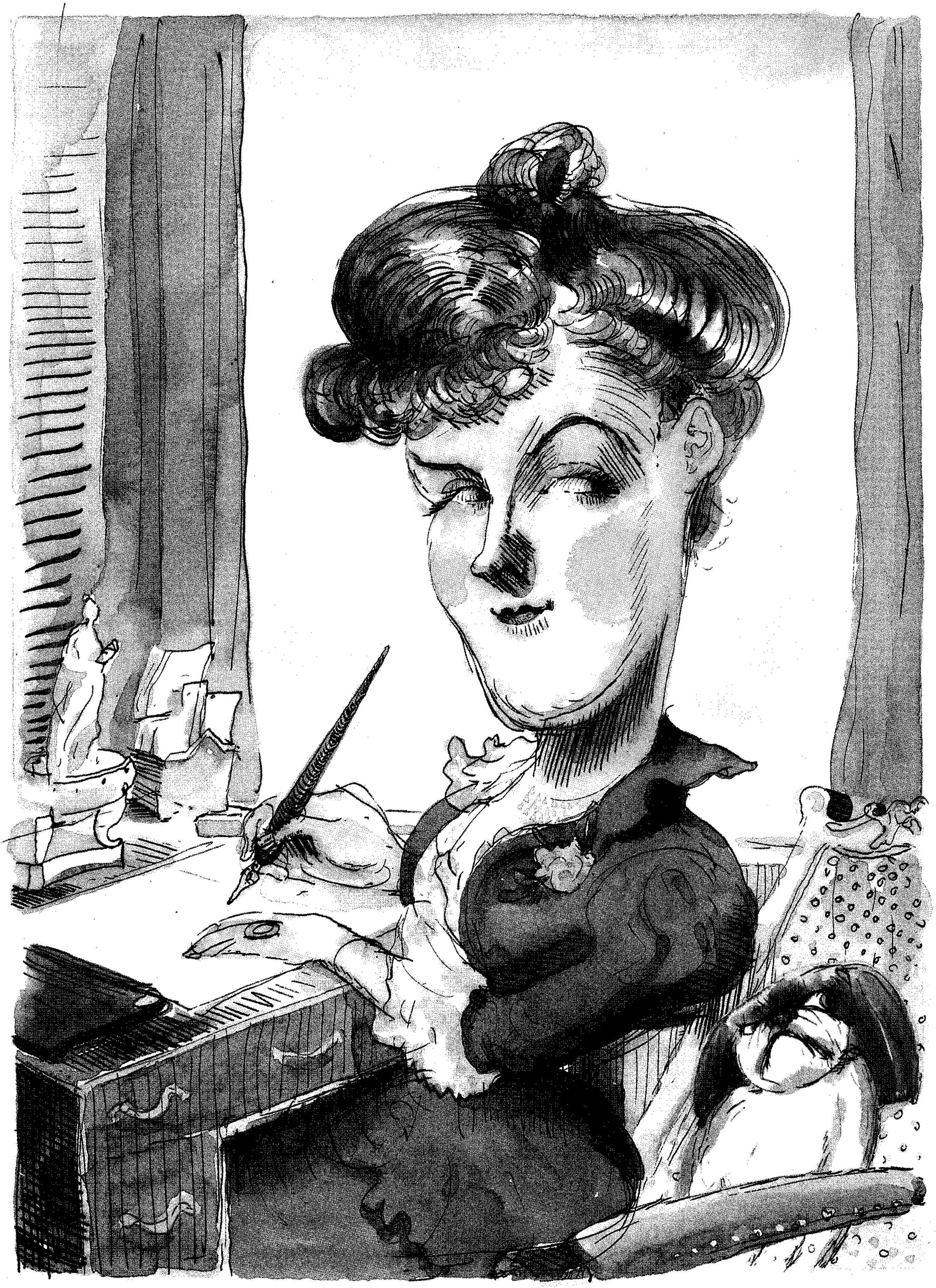
Writing a story called "Beatrice Palmato," Edith Wharton got no further than an outline and a single two-page scene, exquisitely detailed and explicitly pornographic, in which a father lovingly completes the sexual initiation of his daughter. The date of composition is uncertain, and has been almost as hotly debated as the significance of the story since it was discovered among Wharton's papers, just over a quarter of a century ago. R.W.B. Lewis first published the fragments in his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, in 1975, along with newfound evidence that Wharton, in middle age, had carried on a wildly passionate, adulterous love affair—from 1908 to 1910, or, roughly, between "The House of Mirth" and "Ethan Frome"—and the paired disclosures revolutionized the image of America's literary dowager queen. Wharton was suddenly up-to-date: familiar, approachable, a woman with her hair coming undone and her priorities in equally fetching disarray. Even feminist critics claimed that the sexual revelations made her "more intriguing and more likable," and allowed us to view her "with new compassion and increased respect." One could reasonably fear for Wharton's new respectability when Shari Benstock's 1994 biography, in a burst of revisionism, argued that the notorious affair had been more talk than action, and the action confined to a mere handful of nights. Wharton would have understood all too well the threat of inverted scandal, the implicit diminution. As a prophet of the female condition, she had noted wearily, back in 1915, "What a woman was criticized for doing yesterday she is ridiculed for not doing today."

There is no place for "Beatrice Palmato" in the Library of America's two new volumes of Wharton's short stories; it is hardly more than a sketch, the most famous story that she never wrote. But, like E. M. Forster's openly homosexual novel, "Maurice," or the swooningly homoerotic letters of Henry James, or Virginia Woolf's memoir of childhood sexual abuse—all posthumously published, for good and ill—its existence has inevitably cast a lurid glare across the rigorously controlled and nuanced works that define the writer's achievement. The sixty-seven stories collected here reflect a lifetime's occupation, ranging from Wharton's first published effort, of 1891, to a story that she sent to her agent just before her death, in 1937. Aside from the sheer pleasure of creation, they served their author at various times as a workshop for her novels, or as a means of earning quick money—Wharton was one of the highest-paid short-story writers in America—or as an emotional release that was unavailable to her in any other way. Far more than her novels, Wharton's stories are rooted in the fluctuations of her life; the longer, richer works, though unquestionably her greater accomplishment, stand at a magisterial remove. In the wake of "Beatrice Palmato," recent studies have scoured the stories for telltale signs of father-daughter incest, but readers of these volumes are apt to be struck with the exposure of far more everyday varieties of horror: moral cowardice, being unloved or unloving, making rational compromises in order to live and discovering that one has reasoned one's life away, unendurable loneliness that must be endured—and that seems to have been endured by Wharton from 1891 to 1937.

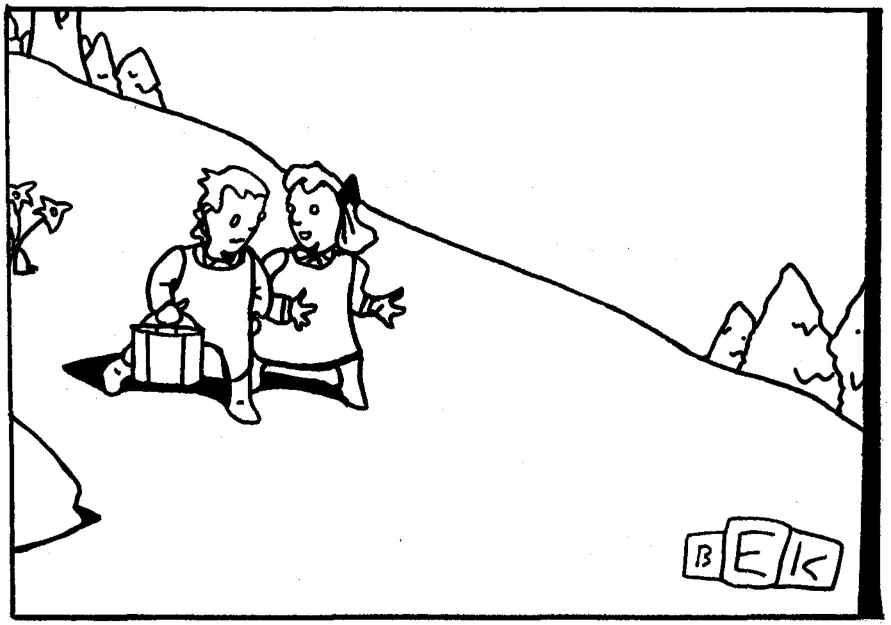
Her life was, to all appearances, brilliantly social and successful—hardly a writer's life at all. Born into the commercial aristocracy of New York in 1862, Edith Newbold Jones was the only daughter of a woman so fashionable that she was rumored to have made "keeping up with the Joneses" a proverbial necessity. Edith's father was a being of a different order: deeply moved by Tennyson, a devourer of books on exotic travel, a man who taught his small daughter to read and who might have developed his own feeling for literature if his wife had not been closed to all it represented. At least, this was how their daughter depicted the mismatched pair, in a memoir written during the last years of her life. There is some evidence that Lucretia Rhinelander Jones was not entirely indifferent to her daughter's literary calling; she did, for example, have a volume of Edith's adolescent "Verses" privately printed. What Wharton best remembered, however, was her mother's stern discouragement. Of Edith's father, the tall and blue-eyed George Frederic Jones, there are few available records; anything beyond what his daughter wished to reveal must be sought in what she may have revealed without wishing to.

The unearthing of "Beatrice Palmato" did not bring critics to believe, at first, that Edith Wharton had been the victim of her father's sexual advances. Lewis was quick to assert that the incest motif was "pure and utter fantasy." Cynthia Griffin Wolff, who discovered the fragment, wrote that, biographically, it provided no more than "an aperçu into the wellsprings of the girl's fantasy life." But recent scholars have characteristically gone a more literal route. The legitimate desire to redress long-held Freud-sanctioned doubts about women's reports of early abuse has often led, alas, to the wresting of sexual "facts" from the haziest of fictions. Barbara A. White, the author of the only book-length study of Wharton's stories, strenuously argues for linking Wharton's identity with the ravished Beatrice, on the basis of evidence that becomes less convincing with every stretch of the stories on the rack of interpretation. Dead husbands, claustrophobic wives, anything remotely resembling a secret, even a voice speaking a foreign language

BARRY BLITT



Wharton's stories served as an emotional release that was unavailable to her in any other way.



"Jack, when we get down the hill let's put the pail up for auction."

• •

on a radio: all become "a perfect paradigm for child sexual abuse." One cannot state with certainty that White is wrong, but, with a different set of plot details, one could as easily "prove" that Wharton had committed a murder or borne an illegitimate child.

And then, if we are considering concealed sexual messages, is not a dead husband reasonably significant in itself? Edith Jones was twenty-three when, abandoned by two earlier suitors, she married the guileless and hapless Edward Wharton, a decision that Henry James would later call the "inconceivable thing." The marriage was a disaster: intellectually, emotionally, and, above all, sexually. Setting down the particulars forty-nine years later, Wharton reserved all blame for her mother, writing that Lucretia's refusal to answer her desperate questions, on the eve of her wedding, about what happened between married men and women "did more than anything else to falsify and misdirect my whole life." After what seems to have been one or two attempts at grappling with their mysterious bodies, Teddy and Edith lived together in celibacy for twenty-eight years.

Perhaps the only thing more difficult to conceive is how all this may apply to literature. And yet it is undeniably striking that among the four major female writers in the English language of this period—Virginia Woolf, Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, and Wharton—there was so astoundingly little practicing heterosexuality, so much aversion to the male. If one accepts Woolf's account of her early abuse by her stepbrothers, and the intimations of abuse by an uncle to be found in Stein, it is Wharton's two-year affair with a man rather than the possibility of incest in her childhood that is the truly anomalous part of her experience. The causes of these sexual unorthodoxies may be a matter for the psychologists, but the results are a matter for us all. It seems fair to say that, in the generation that made the dangerous crossing from the nineteenth century into modernity, an ambitious woman who wanted to write could choose any but the traditional feminine role, and suffer anything but thralldom to a man. Lesbianism, celibacy, repression, suppression, stepbrothers, fathers, trauma: How many books do we owe them?

"The Marriage Law of the new dispensation will be: *Thou shalt not be unfaithful—to thyself*." So concludes the speech of a powerful drawing-room orator on the subject of "the new ethics," in a story called "The Reckoning," which Wharton published in 1902, when she was forty and had been married for seventeen years. Divorce was in many quarters still a scandal but no longer an impossibility. The quest for personal fulfillment—even, in some ways, the sexual revolution—had begun. Divorce in all its ramifications is one of the constant themes of Wharton's fiction, and, even at her most satiric, she gives it something of the anguished moral weight that abortion has for us today. Obviously, it was a matter of much personal relevance: in the earliest stories in these new volumes—stories that she herself felt to be so emotionally overwrought that she declined to include them in her first collection—a weak husband is compared to a grandmother and a poodle before turning up as the aforementioned corpse, stiffening in an upper berth while accompanying his wife on a train home to New York. Wharton, from her marriage, in 1885, through nearly the turn of the century, wrote stories and poetry only sporadically—when she needed to, it might be said. This lack of steady focus was partly due to the social schedule of a wealthy young lady of good family, and partly due to the fact that the young lady kept on breaking down.

Throughout this period, Wharton suffered the classic symptoms of hysteria: asthma, inability to eat, and a depression so enveloping that in 1898 she underwent a version of the standard "cure"—Woolf was given much the same treatment—consisting of isolation, bed rest, no writing, and much food. This happened on the brink of the publication of her first collection of stories, which was very advantageous timing for the reputation of the cure. The reviews were so radiantly encouraging that she set to work at last on her long-delayed dream of a novel, and was, basically, as strong as a horse for the rest of her life. Not so Teddy, who began to crumble almost as soon as his wife began to thrive. Over the next decade, she published some thirty stories and three novels, while he acquired a full complement of the symptoms she had overcome.

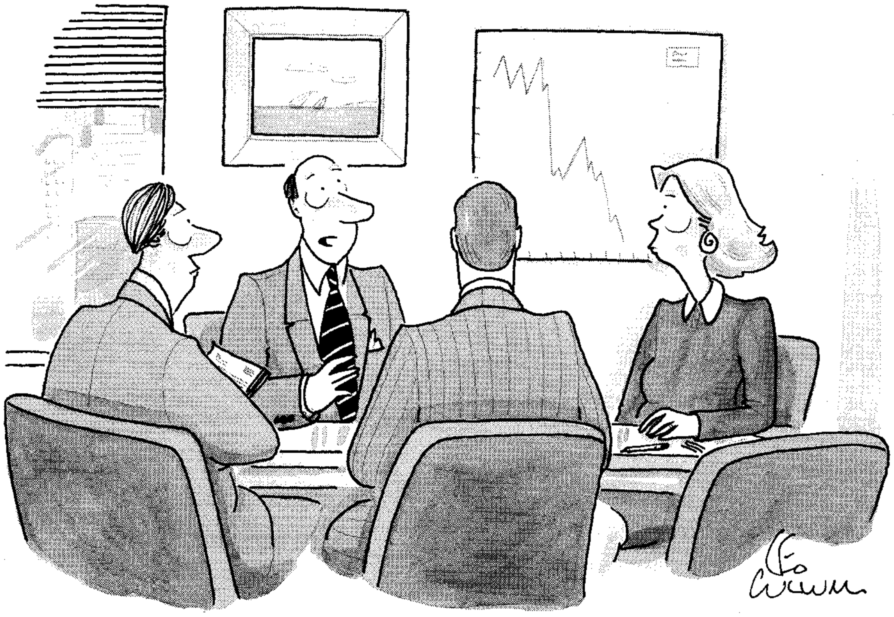
Her first collection was, in fact, one of the best she ever published, and contained several indisputable marvels. "The Pelican," "Souls Belated," and "The Muse's Tragedy" are enormously varied in color and tone, and yield an equally varied series of insights into women's hearts and strategies. The first is a character portrait as startlingly fresh as a Sargent watercolor, of a doting mother who turns to public speaking in order to support her son, and who cannot admit that she comes to love the work rather more than she does him. The second, a socially inflected romance of the genre that Wharton was to make her own, tells of a married woman who runs away with her lover and discovers what Anna Karenina could not bear to know—that love feeds on the duties and distractions of a shared society ("those common obligations which make the most imperfect marriage in some sort a centre of gravity"). The third is a rich reimagining of a genre belonging to James, in which a poet's muse, looking back, reviles the inspiration she has given.

Wharton was not by any standard measure a feminist. The muse's tragedy is not the fact that she is not a poet herself but that the poet never loved her as a woman. The public speaker is ridiculously bad at the work she can't bear to give up. But no one between Nietzsche and Simone de Beauvoir was so ruthlessly clear in depicting the deforming effects of social history on the human female, in examining the dreadful methods she has been constrained to use in order to obtain the trivial things she has been taught to want. And no one has given us so many ways to love and to hate, often simultaneously, the weak, manipulative, pitiful, dangerous, and beautiful creatures this history produced.

The great women writers of the English tradition have always been eager to express their disdain for the conventionally artful, professionally feminine women of their day. This less than sororal attitude goes back at least to Jane Eyre's contempt for the meretricious arts and curls of the undeniably magnificent Blanche Ingram ("Miss Ingram," thanks to her moral faults, "was a mark beneath jealousy") and to George Eliot's poisonous Rosamond Vincy in "Middlemarch," patting her fair hair and despoiling her husband's soul. A secondary character by necessity, the conniving woman is the one sitting across the room, batting her eyes at the hero while the far more worthy authoress watches and writhes and plots her revenge in print. Edith Wharton has often been criticized for a lack of sympathy for her characters. But, in daring to place the fashionable beauty at the center of her story, she was offering a glimpse into a rarely visited consciousness, far more complex if not assuredly more noble than it had ever been taken to be.

Wharton's most forthright statement about this woman is contained in a buoyant little satire titled "The Other Two," of 1904. The story traces a man's growing awareness that his beloved wife has not only climbed her way to wealth, husband by husband, but easily adapted herself to be a perfectly fitting mate to each: "Her elasticity was the result of tension in too many different directions. Alice Haskett—Alice Varick—Alice Waythorn—she had been each in turn, and had left hanging to each name a little of her privacy, a little of her personality, a little of the inmost self where the unknown god abides." In Wharton's strongest novel, "The House of Mirth," published just a year after this story, the heroine, Lily Bart, similarly "disciplined by years of enforced compliance," pretends not to smoke or gamble or think in order to catch a rich and priggish bore. ("We could none of us imagine your putting up with him for a moment," she is assured by a friend, "unless you meant to marry him.") But Lily, Wharton's most complex portrait of a lady, is as repulsed by her slavish tactics as she is dependent on their results, and in Wharton's world the conflict insures that she will not survive.

But, then, in Wharton's world all the alternatives are bleak. The essential experience, behind every choice, is loneliness—Wharton's first story, written at twenty-eight, is about an old lady so alone that her nearest connections are with the magnolia and the caged parrot that she peers at from her window. Marriage is possibly worse; Wharton was a knowing admirer of George Eliot's observation that "marriage is so unlike anything else—there is something even awful in the nearness it brings," although she added to this her own observation that love outside a marriage-like union only made for a different sort of misery, characterized by a starved inadequacy of common bonds. The sixty-seven stories collected here contain, by rough count, four happy marriages and fourteen marriages whose explicit unhappiness forms a major premise of the action. And yet divorce, for all Wharton's consideration of it as a subject and her tacit support of it as a right, is possibly the most fearsome enterprise of all. Wharton concludes "The Reckoning" with a stunning social prophecy, delivered by the drawing-room orator's wife, a woman who left her own boring husband years before in order to marry this ardent freethinker, and who is devastated now at being left, in her turn, for a more exciting, younger woman. "The law


"What we didn't have but obviously needed was an alarmist."

represents material rights," she begins, threading her way hesitantly through her thoughts. "It can't go beyond. If we don't recognize an inner law . . . the obligation that love creates . . . being loved as well as loving . . . there is nothing to prevent our spreading ruin unhindered . . . is there?"

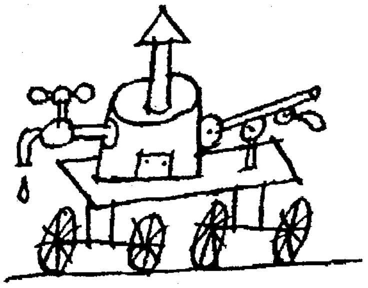
Edmund Wilson observed, rather testily, just a few years after Wharton's death, that "there are no first-rate men" in her novels. No heroes: no Mr. Darcy, no Mr. Rochester, no Will Ladislaw or Tom Outland, no one even to offer a hand and help the lady out. In "The House of Mirth," Lily Bart is badly damaged by the man who, in the work of another novelist, might have carried her away. Lawrence Selden, Lily's companion, offers her the regard of a connoisseur admiring an exquisite bit of animated porcelain, a regard that he nevertheless encourages her to confuse with love. It is Selden's peculiar function to draw out Lily's feelings and to continually subvert her marital plans, while refusing to make any claim on her himself. Instead, he presents her with sublime, if hypocritical, ideals—indifference to money, to society—which serve only to mock the realities that she confronts. ("Why do you make the things I have chosen seem hateful to me," Lily cries, "if you have nothing to give me instead?") Whether Selden is cruel or a coward or simply unable to love the heroine as she might wish—or, perhaps, as he might wish—is left to the reader to decide. Wharton herself vacillates; as much as Lily and Selden, she seems entirely uncertain about what this character intends by his soul-shattering advances and retreats.

There are several versions of this "negative hero," as Wharton referred to Selden, in her early stories, in which he may be said to form an equally sorry counterpart to the marital corpse. The muse of "The Muse's Tragedy" seeks to forgive the poet: "he had never made love to me; it was no fault of his if I wanted more than he could give me." In "The Touchstone," published in 1900, a great woman novelist also suffers the pain that such a negative lover inflicts: "the physical reluctance"—on his part—"had, inexplicably, so overborne the intellectual attraction, that the last years had been, to both of them, an agony of conflicting impulses." When Wharton attempts the man's point of view—as late as 1912, in "The Long Run"—there is no further enlightenment: all he recalls of fleeing an ideal romance at its sexual threshold is panic, numbness, and loss. Of course, this lack of comprehension must be qualified: this is all that Wharton allows him to recall; the confusion remains very much her own.

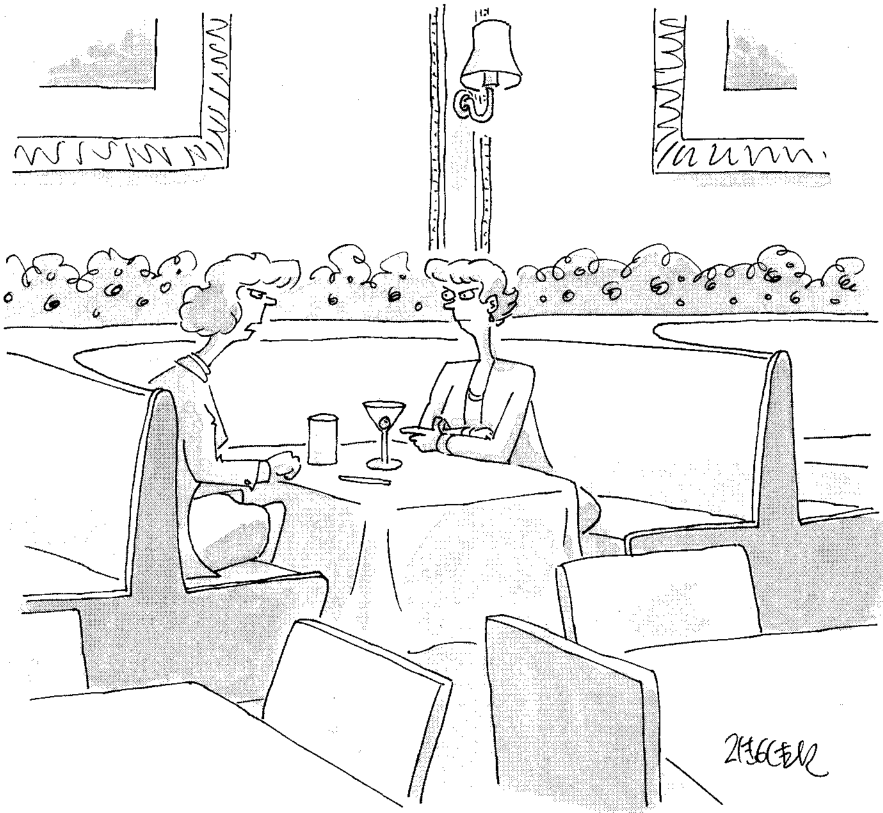
What is this man afraid of? What is it that he—or Wharton—cannot express? It is odd that critics and biographers, who have made so much of Wharton's dependence on James, have failed to fix on the crucial similarity between her "negative hero" and the emotionally deadlocked, sexually barricaded heroes of the Master—heroes whose homosexual desires, like James's, were concealed within a jungle of verbal circumlocution. Wharton had no such verbal screens in her stylistic repertoire, but the logical inconsistencies and emotional riddles of "The House of Mirth"—and of several early stories—become equally understandable if seen in the light of the unadmitted homosexuality of Wharton's leading man. Diana Trilling, writing forty years ago, in a social climate that accepted James as celibate for the sake of his art—rather than, as he is seen today, sexually suppressed for the sake of his culture—viewed Lawrence Selden as a portrait of James himself, in all his moral elevation and aesthetic piety. This cannot be accurate: the type occurs in Wharton's stories well before she became a friend of James's, in 1904. Yet there is a larger accuracy in the notion that Wharton was caught up with a Jamesian hero in the flesh.

Wharton's friend and first biographer, Percy Lubbock, identified "the dry and narrow and supercilious" Walter Berry (himself a friend of James's and of Proust's) as the invariable model for Wharton's misbegotten hero. Berry was the first man Wharton loved: in 1883, she had waited in vain for him to propose; instead, he'd fled without a word, and kept away for fourteen years. By the time he returned, she was long married, he was a "confirmed bachelor," and their friendship resumed the overtones, if not the substance, of romance. She considered him her best literary adviser, but whatever comments he may have made about his baleful appearance in her work went up in smoke; Wharton burned all but the most innocuous of their letters. (The heroine of "The Muse's Tragedy," publishing her letters from the poet, fills them with phony ellipses to suggest intimacies that never existed; one cannot help but wonder if Wharton burned Berry's letters for what they *didn't* say.) On Berry's death, in 1927, Wharton requested that his ashes be scattered over the garden of her home in France. His funeral wreaths, however, were placed by his close and loving cousin on the grave of Oscar Wilde.

Wharton did not burn her so-called "love diary"—a little volume begun in 1907, filled with dizzyingly joyous and tortured entries addressed to an anonymous man—but left it among her papers, clearly marked: "The Life Apart." Because Wharton had written extensively and adoringly of Berry in her memoirs, several scholars assumed, after the diary's discovery, that he was the lover who once had torn her life apart. It is even possible that Wharton intended the misidentification, as a sort of posthumous bibliographic consummation. But the distinction of breaking the pattern of sexual thwartedness and giving Wharton her first experience of a "positive hero" actually belonged to a man she did not mention at all.



Wharton tried to get Morton Fullerton to return her letters, but he had, apparently, too much pride and too much of a sense of history (and perhaps its dollar value) to do it; more than three hundred of them can now be read in university collections. He also preserved the private, often frankly sexual poems that she wrote for him, carefully copying them out and annotating the date and sometimes the occasion before



"I was on hormone replacement for two years before I realized that what I really needed was Steve replacement."

returning them to her as she had requested. Fullerton, like Berry, was an American and a friend of Henry James's, but there the resemblance ends. Wharton's biographers tend to refer to him as a Lothario or a Don Juan, and a new biography of Fullerton himself, by Marion Mainwaring, labels him a lifelong "victim of devotion." Lanky, fair, and psychologically canny, Fullerton seems to have known how to make himself irresistible to everyone, male or female. He often juggled two or three affairs at a time, and his range extended from Oscar Wilde's friend Lord Gower (the reputed model for Wilde's Lord Henry Wotton, who lures Dorian Gray to "what the world calls sin"), to an older woman with the splendid title of Ranee of Sarawak (Fullerton lived in fear of reprisal from her husband, the Rajah), to his own considerably younger cousin, to whom he was engaged during much of the time he was making love to Wharton. An aspiring littérateur and professional Francophile, Fullerton worked as the Paris correspondent for the London *Times;* he is said to have turned out his dispatches in a peculiarly ornate, Jamesian style.

James himself fell in love with Fullerton in about 1900, although he had known him by then for nearly a decade. Around the turn of the century, James, facing advancing age and immense loneliness, seems also to have begun to face his own sexual desires—if not directly, then teasingly and allusively—in doting letters to several younger men. First among these was Fullerton, twenty-two years James's junior and the object of his most histrionic praise and fervent expressions of longing. "You do with me what you will," James wrote him in September, 1900. "You are dazzling, my dear Fullerton; you are beautiful; you are more than tactful, you are tenderly, magically *tactile.*" In December, 1905, he wrote him in terms that James's biographers have long been at pains to call metaphorical: "I can't keep my hands off you."

Fullerton, seeking full muse status, claimed to be James's model for the "longish, leanish, fairish" journalist Merton Densher of "The Wings of the Dove"—arguably the most sexually forthright male in James's work—which was completed in 1902. This was the first of his novels that James sent to Edith Wharton, in response to a gift of two collections of her stories (already categorized by the critics as "Jamesian"). Wharton had tentatively approached James several times before, but he now seemed willing to take her mentorship fully in hand. "Don't pass it by—the immediate, the real, the ours, the yours. . . . *Do New York!*" he virtually bellowed, urging her to ignore his own example "of exile and ignorance." This was, ironically, the precise moment in James's career—the emergence of his late style, with its combined monumentalism and microscopy—when Wharton was to abandon all desire to emulate his increasingly difficult art. "Don't ask me what I think of 'The Wings of the Dove,' " she appended to a letter proudly informing her publisher of James's praise and advice. About her very real pleasure in meeting James himself, not long afterward, she confided that he "talks, thank heaven, more lucidly than he writes."

In urging Wharton to do New York, James was warning her against the mode of her first novel, a pseudo-Italian historical hodgepodge titled "The Valley of Decision," which was having a big commercial and even a critical success. Wharton informed James that, with her proceeds, she had purchased a fancy new motorcar. (Motoring together, with Wharton's chauffeur at the wheel, was to be one of the great shared pleasures of their friendship.) To which James replied, "With the proceeds of my last novel"—"The Wings of the Dove"—"I purchased a small go-cart. . . . It needs a coat of paint. With the proceeds of my next novel I shall have it painted." The joke must have seemed less funny when, with the actual profits of his next two novels—"The Ambassadors" and "The Golden Bowl"—James could not afford to paint his go-cart, since the publisher's advance, of six hundred pounds, totalled more than they earned in sum. In 1904, James wrote to William Dean Howells that "the Golden Dream was as broken outside, as the Golden Bowl within."

The following year, Wharton did

New York in "The House of Mirth," writing at top speed in order to make the monthly serialization deadlines of *Scribner's Magazine*. The book went on to become the fastest-selling novel in the publisher's history, selling more than a hundred thousand copies in its first two months. James wrote her his warm congratulations, and assured her that the novel was "*extremely* well written," if not quite so well composed, that Lily was "very big and true," even if Selden was "too *absent*," and that the best way to say all that he wished would be to return to the United States to deliver a lecture on "The question of the *roman de mœurs* in America—its deadly difficulty."

In this period, James was increasingly depressed. Isolated at his home in Sussex through long seasons of bad English weather, he had begun virtually to beg his young and lively friends to visit. In the fall of 1907, he asked Fullerton to spend a few days on his way from Paris back to America. "My difficulty is that I love you too fantastically much," he wrote. "You touch and penetrate me to the quick, and I can only stretch out my hand to draw you closer." Fullerton did not stop to see James. Once in America, however, he did go to visit the Whartons, only recently introduced to him by James ("Mrs. W. is planning to put her hand on you," James had forewarned), at the French château that Edith had built in Massachusetts. There, Fullerton and Mrs. W. took long walks together in the countryside; she began writing her "love diary" three days after he left. There followed several months of moral and emotional anguish, after which, as the same document reveals, they became lovers, in Paris, the following spring. She was forty-five; Fullerton, forty-two. "I have known what happy women feel," Wharton wrote exultantly in April, 1908. "For the first time in my life *I can't read*."

She couldn't write terribly well, either. During the period of roughly two years that the affair went on, she produced no novels, and her stories display a marked falling off from earlier standards, suggesting an argument if not for celibacy then for a basis of emotional stability in a certain kind of writer's life. To be sure, she had written bad stories before—works seemingly botched through overemphasis and heavy-handed plot reversals—but nothing quite so deadeningly formulaic as "The Daunt Diana," "The Debt," and "Full Circle," which are lined up in these volumes like a row of tombstones. Reasonably better, and enlivened with a charge of psychological tension, are two stories that clearly reflect aspects of the affair: "The Pretext," of 1908, in which a dully married middle-aged woman is caught up in an excruciatingly ardent if unspoken love, and "The Letters," of 1910, in which a rich young woman marries an amoral but extremely sexy dilettante, and lives happily ever after with her eyes determinedly half shut. The portrait of Fullerton in the latter, in all his dreamy golden lassitude, seems historically exact, as does the state of continual emotional turmoil into which he had plunged the author. And to whom, besides her diary and the occasional short story, could the proper Mrs. Wharton confide this turmoil? Only to one person, it would seem: her dear and understanding friend Henry James.

Handelsman

"Well! I'm already pre-disapproved for a credit card."

By the autumn of 1908, James was writing Wharton calming letters about Fullerton's tendency to disappear without explanation, and assuring her of his own "aboundingly tender friendship." James himself hardly saw Fullerton at all anymore, but he seemed to participate vicariously in the affair, writing Wharton in January, 1909, "Glad as I am that we 'care' for him, you & I; for verily I think I do as much as you, & that you do as much as I." And then, in March, 1909, James published a story in *The English Review* titled "The Velvet Glove," in which a magnificently rich, domineering, motorcar-owning authoress of tawdry popular romances corners a fine-grained man of letters at a soirée and, taking him for a spin, crudely exhorts him to write a preface for her new novel. He is revolted: not only is she guilty of the "dreadful amateurish dance of ungrammatically scribbling" her far too popular works; she is secretly embroiled with a spoiled and dazzling youth, over whom our fine-grained fellow admits that he "in fact imaginatively, intellectually, so to speak, quite yearned."

The letter Wharton wrote to James in immediate response no longer exists; he burned almost all her letters, along with others that he received in these years. But we know, from his reply, that she had pronounced the story "really good" and offered nothing but lavish and innocent praise. In response, James grew a bit sheepish. He volunteered that the story had been rejected by two American "high-class" periodicals, which was, he wrote her, a good deal like "declining you since *bien assurément* the whole thing *reeks* with you," as well as with her car and with her chauffeur—no mention of her novels—and he thanked her, finally, for renewing his confidence in his work. As for Wharton, she blithely recommended "The Velvet Glove" to a friend, and singled it out in her memoirs as "perhaps the most beautiful" of James's later stories, casually adding that it was based on his experience with a "young Englishwoman of great position," who had sought from James a literary "boost." Her various ploys seem to have worked: even readers who have observed "something deeply mocking and hostile" in the story—these are the words of James's biographer Leon Edel—have concluded that Wharton herself perceived nothing seriously amiss.

True, nothing in her letters to anyone betrayed hurt or rancor, but she was unable to keep her feelings from pouring out in one breathtakingly hurt and rancorous work of fiction: "The Eyes," published a little more than a year after "The Velvet Glove," in June, 1910, a story bilious and insinuating and spiked with revenge, and one of the best she ever wrote. Although the plot involves some ghosts—or parts of ghosts—this is an emotional horror story, much in the way of James's "The Beast in the Jungle," in that it tells of a haunted man who does not understand the meaning of the thing that haunts him. As it opens, a circle of friends, all male, has gathered in the home of their oldest and most admired member, Andrew Culwin. Highly polished, self-preoccupied, unmarried, and undisturbed by common human experience, Culwin is a detached observer of other people's lives. He habitually clings to his guests late into the night, and on this evening only two remain—the narrator and the latest in a series of Culwin's young protégés—when he relates the story of a ghost that used to visit him in the disembodied form of a pair of eyes, hideously old and red-rimmed and corrupt, glaring out of the dark at the foot of his bed: "They seemed to belong to a man who had done a lot of harm in his life, but had always kept just inside the danger lines. They were not the eyes of a coward, but of someone much too clever to take risks. . . . Their look left a smear like a snail's."

The inexplicable thing to Culwin is that these demonic accusers appeared on the two occasions in his life when he had acted most selflessly. On the first, he had proposed marriage to a dull but amiable girl whose affections he had half-wittingly aroused (and from whom, compelled by the eyes, he finally fled). On the second, he had offered literary encouragement to a "slender and smooth and hyacinthine" young man who was entirely devoid of talent. The result, Culwin points out, was no great tragedy—the boy had merely become a laughingstock and, finally disabused of his illusions, a drunk. "Put two and two together if you can," Culwin remarks. "For my part I haven't found the link." His protégé, however, is overcome, and buries his head in his arms. Laying a gouty hand on the young man's shoulder, Culwin looks up into a mirror and confronts himself "with a glare of slowly gathering hate."

James does not appear to have commented on the story. The resemblance between him and Andrew Culwin, suggested by Adeline R. Tintner in an article in the nineteen-seventies, is convincing—it is hardly possible to read parts of the story without seeing James's image—but the identification has not been widely accepted. Others have preferred to see Culwin as a portrait of Fullerton, or Berry, or, more recently and inevitably, Wharton's father. Whoever he is, he is attacked in overtly sexual terms not seen in Wharton's prose before. Of Culwin's taste for young male protégés, one of his friends asserts that he "liked 'em juicy," and Culwin, who speaks of "the complete impossibility of my marrying" the amiable girl, dotes openly on the young man's physical charms. ("His stupidity was a natural grace," he tells his listeners. "It was as beautiful, really, as his eyelashes.") His comparison of the youth's beauty to an antique statue of Antinoüs amounts to the use of a homosexual code.

This is one of Wharton's least controlled and most powerful works, as fully mocking and hostile as anything James had dished out. Anger and injury, possibly exacerbated by the pain of feeling Fullerton irrevocably slipping away—the affair ended in June, 1910, the month of the story's publication—seem to have swept her past her usual limits. The sexual and financial jealousy boiling beneath James's literary attack in "The Velvet Glove" becomes, in Wharton's story, a sexual fury mercilessly directed at James—or, more precisely, at the hero she had long ago assembled out of Jamesian intellectual charms and sexual evasions, and had never squarely faced. One wonders if she knew exactly what she had done. Stripping her "negative hero" of the protective veils of her own carefully maintained confusion, she exposed not only his sexuality but his cold manipulativeness and monstrous selfishness, and delivered him among the damned.

Wharton rarely gave her best efforts to her stories after this time, although some of her best fiction in other forms was still to come. In 1911, she published the novella "Ethan Frome," which she believed marked her coming-of-age as a craftsman. Completed in the bleak aftermath of the affair, this most pathologically hopeless and wintry of tragedies may bear some relation to Wharton's fear of being buried alive, in the snows of Massachusetts, with a husband to whom her only remaining emotional tie was pity, and whose behavior was increasingly unbalanced. In the fall of that year, she sold their American home and moved, alone, to Paris. She obtained a divorce in 1913, the year she published "The Custom of the Country," a novel so acerbic in its treatment of Americans that she seems to have wished to divorce the entire population.

The war years further overturned

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her life by impelling her to action: she established refugee hostels and a children's-rescue committee and, under the auspices of the French Red Cross, visited military hospitals at the front to report on their needs. In 1915, the cover of the magazine *Le Rire* featured a cartoon of an immensely imposing Wharton, accompanied by Walter Berry and her chauffeur, inspecting war damage through a lorgnette. But Wharton adopted her new country wholeheartedly; in the remaining years of her life, she returned to the United States only once. When, in 1919, she began work on a historical novel set in New York, "The Age of Innocence," she required the assistance of a friend at home to do research.

It was Willa Cather who observed that the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts; this was the year of "Ulysses," "The Waste Land," and Virginia Woolf's "Jacob's Room." Edith Wharton had won a Pulitzer Prize for "The Age of Innocence," in 1921, albeit by default. (The Columbia University administrators of the award had refused to bestow it on the judges' first choice, Sinclair Lewis's "Main Street," complaining that it did not sufficiently exhibit "the wholesome atmosphere of American life." Wharton felt insulted that her book was considered sufficiently wholesome.) In 1922, Wharton's new novel, "The Glimpses of the Moon," was a runaway best-seller, but its story of money and marriage was wearily familiar. This was the kind of book that led people to suppose, as Rebecca West wrote in her review, that "there must be something wrong with the novel as an art-form." Wharton continued to receive critical praise for this and later books—in 1924, reviewing "Old New York," Edmund Wilson pronounced her an "absolutely first-rate literary artist"—but she found herself suddenly on the dark side of the broken literary planet. In both subject and form, she was old-fashioned, straightforward, unexperimental, unpoetic, and chronically popular with readers.

In 1925, thanking F. Scott Fitzgerald for having sent her "The Great Gatsby," which she admired, Wharton referred to herself ruefully as "the literary equivalent of tufted furniture and gas chandeliers." She was, nevertheless, not pleased to hear this opinion from others. In an essay on American fiction written the same year, Virginia Woolf dismissed "the Henry Jameses, the Hergesheimers, the Edith Whartons" as mere imitators of British conventions, and therefore incapable of contributing anything truly American or new; reading the essay, Wharton is said to have let out an angry cry. (Small wonder. The Hergesheimers?) In a series of essays of her own, Wharton denounced such fashionable contemporary trends as "the tedious 'stream of consciousness,' " and such achievements as the "laborious monuments of schoolboy pornography" which "are now mistaken for works of genius." For Wharton, the boundary lines were clear: novels were about character, stories about plot, and questions about form were for amateurs and frauds. Woolf, Lawrence, Eliot, and, above all, Joyce: she deplored the lot, and, in steady opposition to their explorations, she entrenched herself in literary practices that seemed lifeless even to supporters of a more traditional style. (Fitzgerald thought her newest production, "The Mother's Recompense," which Wharton sent him by return mail, "just *lousy*.")

It was not long before her reputation plummeted. By the time of her death, in 1937, Wharton was a largely disregarded figure, and Edmund Wilson resolutely chiselled her name out of the pantheon of first-rate literary artists. The later pages of the new, perhaps too generous, Library of America volumes contain a bare handful of exceptional stories: the aptly titled "Atrophy," of 1927, which put the contracted dryness of her writing to expressive use in a tight-lipped dialogue between a married woman and her lover's spinster sister, in which nothing meant is said; a delightful throwback titled "A Glimpse," of 1932, a Venetian masquerade detailed in all her early, glowing Sargent colors. Five years later, just before her death, she completed the oddly powerful "All Souls," which, like "The Eyes," relies on ghosts to get at the deeper, fiercer feelings she kept locked away—here, the terror of absolute loneliness, made all the more chilling for so perfectly closing the circle of her work.

But the great majority of these later efforts, read in sequence, resemble a series of elaborately stage-managed and stiffly posed *tableaux vivants*. Even in "Roman Fever," written in 1934 and possibly her most popular story, the steady grinding of authorial machinery overwhelms her characters' voices and the warm Roman breeze. These stories suggest that Wharton's fierce opposition to the modern literary era was more than a resentment of fading power or passing glory. One might say that modernism challenged the limitations that had always existed in her work, although they had been polished to the sheen of virtues. The new demands for inward scrutiny and sensory immediacy were a direct assault on her hard and brilliant surfaces; the new delight in exposed mental processes defied the tight control that had helped her to become such an astonishingly good writer, but that had also, as much as anything, kept her from becoming a great one.

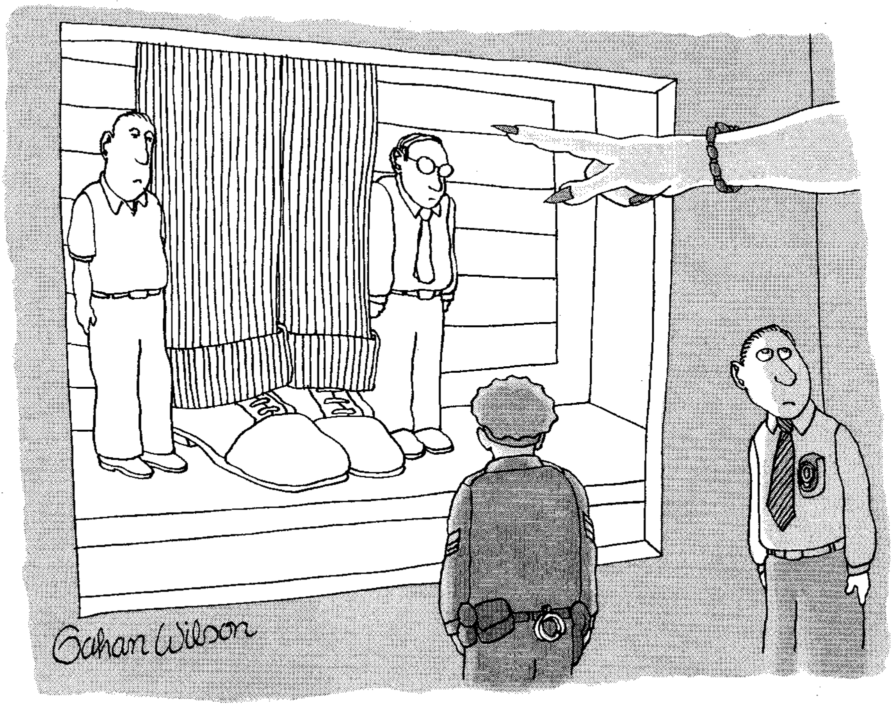
It is particularly strange to think of Wharton turning out her pat and brittle stories for *The Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies' Home Journal* while she contemplated writing "Beatrice Palmato," or kept the completed portion—of which the following is a fair example—stashed inside a drawer:

> She hardly heard him, for the old swooning sweetness was creeping over her. As his hand stole higher she felt the secret bud of her body swelling, yearning, quivering hotly to burst into bloom. Ah, here was his subtle fore-finger pressing it, forcing its tight petals softly apart, and laying on their sensitive edges a circular touch so soft and yet so fiery that already lightnings of heat shot from that palpitating centre all over her surrendered body, to the tips of her fingers, and the ends of her loosened hair.
>
> The sensation was so exquisite that she could have asked to have it indefinitely prolonged; but suddenly his head bent lower, and with a deeper thrill she felt his lips pressed upon that quivering invisible bud, and then the delicate firm thrust of his tongue, so full and yet so infinitely subtle, pressing apart the closed petals, and forcing itself in deeper and deeper through the passage that glowed and seemed to become illuminated at its approach. . . .
>
> "My little girl," he breathed, sinking down beside her.

Wharton was probably referring to this little piece of devilry when, in a letter of 1935, to her friend Bernard Berenson, she disparaged a story by Moravia and some "nastier" works by Faulkner and Céline, with the boast "I've got an incest *donnée* up my sleeve that would make them all look like nursery rhymes." R.W.B. Lewis, who noted that Wharton had also outmatched Joyce and Lawrence on the subject of female sexuality, believed that she set out to write "Beatrice Palmato" at this time—in her seventies, approximately two years before her death. It isn't Wharton's age that makes Cynthia Griffin Wolff's suggestion of an earlier date for the story more appealing, nor is it Wolff's belief that Wharton was reacting to a sexually eye-opening trip to Morocco—harems, child brides, etc.—which she made in 1917. It is, rather, the thought of Wharton angrily picking up her pen just a few years later—say, about 1922—after having forced her way through the "schoolboy pornography" of "Ulysses," and deciding to show Molly Bloom a thing or two about saying yes.

She might well have kept the story up her sleeve all those years. She knew that she couldn't publish it, and, in the form she'd planned, she couldn't finish it, either. It has been pointed out that the single scene Wharton wrote does not fit anywhere in her outline, which details how Beatrice's older sister mysteriously commits suicide, and how her mother then mysteriously goes mad, and how, at the climax, Beatrice commits suicide, too; it was to be only then, in a sort of dramatic coda, that the terrible secret of Mr. Palmato and his daughters was revealed. Wharton was planning a horror story—like "The Eyes," like "All Souls"—that would have brought together the usual dark thrill and the usual moral price of incest. And, like these other stories, which drew on deeper levels of feeling than she cared to admit or perhaps even knew, "Beatrice Palmato" seems to have run away with her.

Of course, the scene she wrote would have rather spoiled the surprise of her ending. But, even more interesting, it entirely fails to suggest the outline's menacing tone. Ostensibly writing about incest, Wharton rhapsodized about specific and luxuriant pleasures, which sound nothing like childhood abuse and everything like the erotic poems of her Fullerton years. Perhaps most interesting of all, she didn't throw it on the fire—"Beatrice Palmato" remained among her papers, along with her "love diary" and a separate packet she marked "For My Biographer," which contained letters clearly meant to justify her tortured decision to divorce, and documents showing that she had secretly, through her publisher, provided money to the unsuspecting Henry James. Those who have made public Wharton's most private effects have not betrayed their subject but conspired with her in completing her final first-rate work. We know what she wanted us to know about her life, and the story has come down to us as she would have written it: a strong plot, a brilliant but self-divided heroine, a full supply of negative heroes, and an overturning smash surprise at the end. ♦



FICTION

WOVEN, SIR

BY JOHN BERGER

I am in Madrid and waiting for my friend Juan, a sculptor, who will be late, I think. Juan works in a small garage, like a mechanic, lying on his back, as though underneath a car; he looks at his watch only when he crawls out and gets to his feet. We have agreed to meet in the lounge of the Ritz Hotel.

There are two exotic trees and, leading off this lounge, a bar named after Velázquez. (I doubt whether he drank much.) The walls and the ceiling are painted a whitish yellow, not what the paint manufacturers call ivory but the true color of elephants' tusks—much closer to the color of old teeth. The ceiling is as high as three elephants standing on one another's backs.

As soon as you come off the street and the double glass doors swing shut behind you, you are aware of the deafness of money. It's not an empty silence, but a silence of seclusion—like that of the depth of an ocean. The wide, carpeted staircase is palpably quiet, and in the lounge the voices of the people talking are muted. Two waiters, carrying tinkling trays of glasses full of champagne, wear white gloves. The seclusion, here, prompts me to remember the clamor of shanty towns and the everlasting racket in prisons.

The first guests are arriving for an evening reception. A reception is being held to launch the new Venezuelan economy, which, evidently, now depends on Spanish investors. The guests, mostly in their thirties, have surf-riding smiles, controlled eyes, and a way of tilting themselves forward which makes me think of the figureheads once carved on ships. In the muted quiet, cameramen and journalists are waiting for the stars who have been announced ahead of time.

Not far from where I'm sitting, three hotel guests, who appear to have nothing to do with the reception, have installed themselves on two sofas and a deep armchair, as if they were at home. Perhaps they are at home. Perhaps they never leave their home and, like snails, carry it with them.

The waiters and the cameramen are respecting their claimed territory. On the floor between the two sofas is a large Chinese carpet, and the man of the trio, who is also the youngest, is pacing slowly, smoking a Cuban cigar.

Those invited to launch the new economy are all—women and men—agents of promotion. I wonder if it is the imaginative effort of promotion which obliges them to lean forward in the way they do. I imagine some of them, at the end of a long day, catching a glimpse of themselves reflected in a glass, when this leaning forward then provokes a kind of paralyzing panic—a fear of falling forward, flat on one's face! (Like the panic sometimes visible on the faces of those suffering from Parkinson's.) This evening, however, they are confident as they lean forward to take the glasses of champagne from the trays offered them by the waiters with white gloves.

For the man with the Cuban cigar, smoking appears to be a way of slowing down the process—or, possibly, his awareness of the process—of things getting steadily worse.

A young woman, seated on an upright chair opposite me, is reading a book. Like me, she is waiting for somebody who is late, though she looks toward the door more frequently than I do. I suspect she is waiting for a lover and is beginning to doubt that he will turn up this evening. The mounting crescendo of her disappointment is expressed by the ever briefer glances she accords to the book. Suddenly she slaps it shut, gets to her feet, and walks out between the camera lights set up for the stars.

I see a man coming down the wide staircase, a room key dangling from his lightly clenched fist. From the way he holds the key, it could be a bird he has in his hand. He is wearing a checkered cap, tweed jacket, plus fours with heavy woollen socks, and brogues. His name is Tyler. His first name escapes me—probably because I remember that it signified a lot. His first name, whatever it was, evoked the mystery that surrounded him—above all, the mystery of the defeat he had suffered. I always addressed him as "sir."

I don't think I would have noticed him coming down the staircase if it hadn't been for my unexpectedly meeting my mother, in Lisbon, a few months previously. I hadn't given Tyler a thought for years. And the last place that might have triggered a memory of him would have been the Ritz. The meeting with my mother had led to my observing things differently.

I met her in the Praça da Alegria, the Square of Joy. A small public garden with elms, palms, and jacaranda trees, very old-looking. Chickens were pecking for worms on the grass. There was a flowery plaque celebrating Alfredo Keil, who wrote the music for the Portuguese national anthem. An old woman with an umbrella was sitting very still on one of the benches. I thought she was watching the chickens. Then she got to her feet, turned, and walked toward me, using her umbrella as a stick. I instantly recognized my mother.

What are you doing here? I was amazed.

There's something you should know, my boy: it's that the dead don't stay where they are buried.

Naturally, I replied.

I'm not talking about Heaven, she said. Heaven is all very well, but I happen to be talking about something quite different. The dead can choose where they want to live on Earth, always supposing they want to stay on Earth.

They go back to some place where they were happy?

You always thought you knew the answers. You should have listened more to your father.

Where is he now? I asked.

RAY K. METZKER, "PHILADELPHIA" (1964)/LAURENCE MILLER GALLERY

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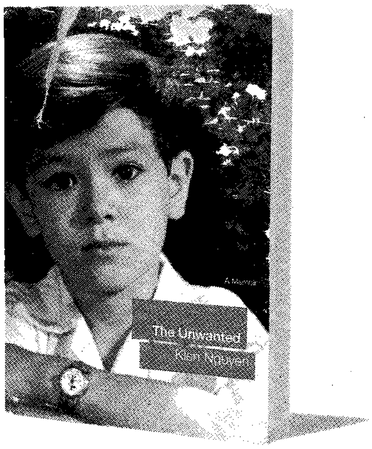

April 30, 1975. The fall of Saigon. As an Amerasian child left behind in Vietnam, Kien Nguyen was more at risk than most. **He was the most unwanted.**

THE UNWANTED by Kien Nguyen

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I don't know, but I fancy he may be in Rome.

Because of the Holy See?

Not at all, because of the tablecloths.

I see, I said.

You may meet the dead anywhere, she said.

Tyler is now at the bottom of the staircase and has taken off his cap and is coming into the lounge. As I follow him with my eyes, he looks away. He had a great gift for looking away and avoiding questions. He chooses the chair vacated by the woman who could wait no longer for her lover. There he picks up a menu for drinks and sandwiches, and studies it through his thick glasses, bringing it close up to his forehead. Often when he dropped some small object—the stub of a pencil, or an eraser—it was I who would look for it on the floor, because he could not see without bending down. Once, the frame of his glasses broke—it was a very cold winter—and it was I who mended them for him with some sticking plaster that we bought at a chemist's shop. This was in 1932 or 1933. I was seven years old. Now he turns the chair he has chosen so that he is not facing me, and gives his order to a waiter.

On one of the trio's sofas reclines a woman with platinum hair. Her skeletal legs are crossed, and a shoe is dangling from her arched foot. She is over eighty. She might be the cigar smoker's mother. She, too, is smoking—her cigarette in a long holder—and the skin of her face and neck is like crêpe paper. Her head—chin up as she exhales the cigarette smoke—reposes on a cushion. Her left arm is draped along the back of the sofa, and the flesh of her arm is draped from its bones. She is wearing golden bracelets and a pearl necklace. Does she come from a circus or a château? She is full of disdain and has the pride of all the appetites she has not lost and is determined to satisfy. Maybe Circe, on her island of Aeaea, was more like this woman with the platinum hair than the one in the usual depictions, centuries later, in Renaissance paintings.

The third member of the trio is the confidante, at least for this evening and—who knows?—perhaps for life, of Circe. Maybe she is her sister Pasiphaë, the one who had an affair with the Bull of Crete and gave birth to the Minotaur. It is impossible to guess the age of this person, tumbled into the massive armchair beside the sofa, because of her size. Her immensity seems like that of time itself. She wears rings on seven fingers. Her neck is as wide as a slender woman's waist. From time to time, she glances protectively at Circe.

The waiter brings Tyler a bottle of white wine in an ice bucket, and a silver stand of sandwiches decorated with parsley.

An actress, accompanied by three men, and wearing a backless dress, makes her entrance into the lounge. She is resplendently pregnant. In answer to a journalist's question, she gently pokes a finger to make a dimple in her belly, and says, The middle of June! The people applaud.

A waiter asks me whether I would like to order something. I do so. After a moment, I hear Tyler's voice: I notice that, regrettably, you haven't improved your pronunciation. You are as lost in Spanish as you once were in English, he says.

I do my best, sir.

You don't listen to how other people talk. You never say to yourself, He speaks well, so I'll listen to him and learn how to speak.

I listen all the time, sir.

You don't listen with enough patience.

I can listen for hours.

Then why do you pronounce so badly?

I don't listen to their words, sir.

Exactly.

During this conversation, Tyler sips his wine and doesn't glance in my direction for a second. Circe is eyeing him with some interest. She is probably telling herself that he is only half her age, but that he is so evidently a gentleman he will ignore the difference.

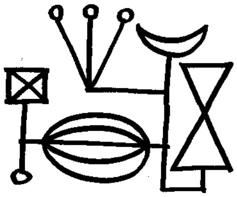
If you want to catch a ball, Tyler explained to us in the Green Hut, you don't snatch at it in the air, you watch it coming and then place your hands accordingly. The Hut was roofed with corrugated iron that was painted green. It had a door that fitted badly and three small windows. There was no heating and no water. Tyler and I brought the water each day in his car. What did we do about shitting? I don't remember. Maybe there was an earth closet outside. A vague memory of vomiting there once. This hut on the edge of a field was our school. Nobody, however, referred to it as such, because Tyler insisted that he was not a schoolmaster but a tutor. A tutor in a green hut.

A young government minister has arrived. He is surveying the lounge to see who else is there. In a minute, he will decide whether to make his entrance straightaway or wait a moment in the Velázquez bar. His bodyguards, too, are surveying the lounge and the entrance hall and the hotel reception desk.

It was in the Green Hut before the eyes of Tyler, now eating his sandwiches decorated with parsley in the lounge of the Ritz Hotel, that I first learned to write. At a nursery school, I had learned to form the letters, all of them, from "A" to "Z," belonging, like moles or birthmarks or beauty spots, to the pert, pretty, rounded body of my teacher, Lilles, whom I desired. Forming the letters, however, was not writing, as Tyler pointed out on my first day in the Green Hut. Writing involves spelling, straight lines, spacing, words leaning the right way, margins, size, legibility, keeping the nib clean, never making blots, and demonstrating on each page of the exercise book the value of good manners.

We were six, all from different families. Wood. Henry. Blagdon. Bowes-Lyon. And one I've forgotten. For every lesson we sat at the same small table. Tyler, when he wasn't looking over our shoulders, stood behind the workbench on which, twice a week, we learned carpentry.

Most educational establishments are mysterious, perhaps because teaching and folly are often the same. And the Green Hut was no exception. I still don't know how the place came to be, how long it had existed before I was sent there, where Tyler came from. He coached boys to get into what were considered good schools. I don't think my parents—unlike the others—paid any fees. I think he ate free in my mother's café—in exchange for his improving my English and making it possible to pass me off as a gentleman boy. We both recognized the hopelessness of the project—I was with him for two and a half years—and this was our secret, which made us, in a strange way, accomplices.



You're going to make a mess of your life.

Why, sir?

Because you can't saw straight.

It's difficult to hold, sir.

Only because you're scared of its teeth. Are you frightened of sawing your thumb off?

No, sir.

Then saw straight.

Apart from carpentry, we learned arithmetic, geometry, Latin, drawing, the history of the Royal Family, geography, physics, and gardening.

How do you spell "hyacinth"?

With a "y," sir.

Of course. But where is the "y"? You're in too much of a hurry. Let the question sink in. Take the measure of it.

During the winter in the Green Hut, the six of us suffered from the cold. There was only a portable paraffin stove, nothing more. And on certain days the can of paraffin was empty. Tyler would pretend he had forgotten—because he preferred us to think that he was absent-minded rather than broke. We had red noses, chilblains on our fingers and toes, and sopping handkerchiefs stuffed into the pockets of our shorts. In the months of January and February, Tyler often wore a long loosely knitted woollen scarf, whose colors astounded us: white and lilac with little flecks of pink—such as you see mixed with snot on your handkerchief after your nose has stopped bleeding.

After the last lesson of the afternoon in the Hut, driving in his car to his home, from where, later, I caught the bus to mine, he would offer me, as I sat beside him, half his scarf.

Where did it come from, sir?

You ask too many questions. You do it to draw attention to yourself.

I'm interested, sir.

You never stop being interested, that's where the trouble begins. Wrap this end around you, keep quiet, and put your gloves on.

Circe sits up, and, with a flick of her head, tosses her hair back. Señor, she asks Tyler, do you find the sandwiches here good?

The bread is a little too thinly cut, but otherwise, yes, señora.

She gazes at him shamelessly; the elegance and sadness of his reply allow it.

Tyler's car was an Austin 7. The roof

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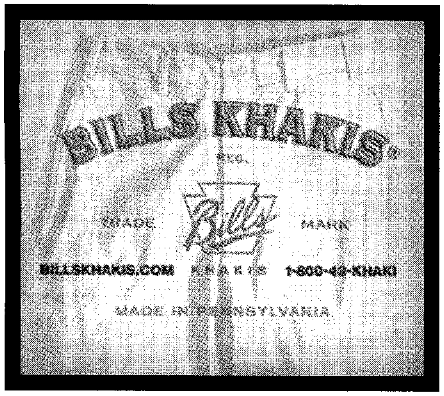

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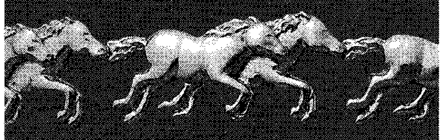

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was a kind of tarpaulin, with brackets that folded. On winter mornings he had to start it by turning the crank handle. I sat in the driver's seat, on the very edge, so that my right foot could touch the accelerator if the engine caught. Sometimes it took us ten minutes. I would shiver, and his mustache got frosted.

Tyler lived in two rented rooms on the ground floor of a large house with a rose garden, which he did not have the right to sit in. The house belonged to a widow, whom I occasionally glimpsed wearing a fur coat or a floral summer dress. She, like Tyler, was a Catholic, which is why she agreed to rent him the two small rooms. He was allowed to leave his car in the drive, but only in one place, at the back of the house by the kitchen door, where the dustbins were.

We'll be leaving tomorrow, Circe says, touching the shoulder of Tyler's tweed jacket, leaving for Huesca. I feel, señor, that you would love Aragon. You might accompany us?

The cigar smoker—Telegonus if he's really the platinum-blonde's son—is now helping to get Pasiphaë out of her chair and onto her feet. It is a hard struggle, and they need both her crutches, which fit under her elbows, to prop her upright. Once on her feet, she turns toward Tyler.

I think you would enjoy seeing our horses, she says.

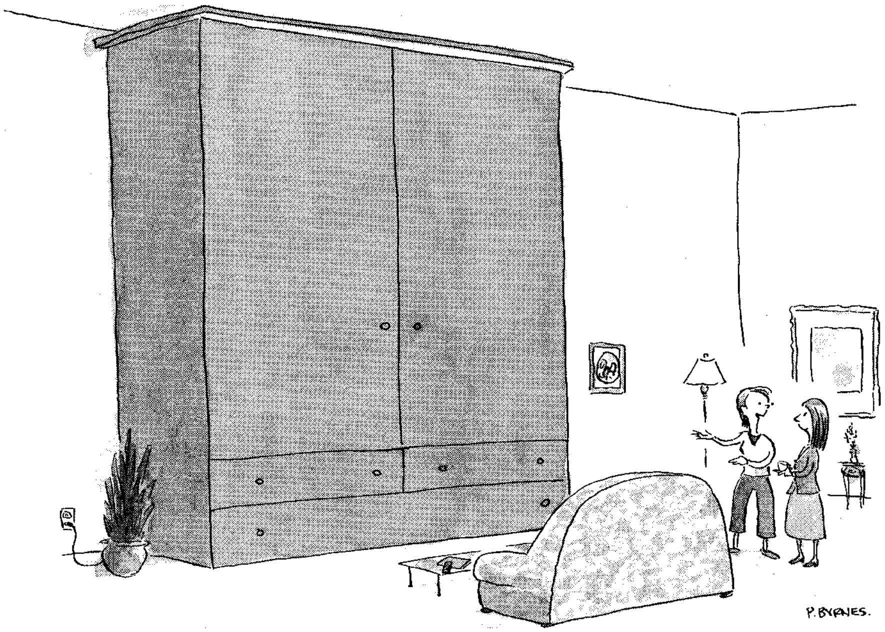
Once more I wonder whether they come from a circus or a château.

Tyler's two rented rooms smelled, like the Green Hut, of his cigarettes. He smoked a brand called De Resque Minor. On the windowsills of the two rooms he grew flowers in wooden boxes. And on the mantelpiece, above the gas fire, he kept the seed packets. They were arranged, on either side of the clock, like letters in their envelopes: Evening Primrose. Red Campion. Meadow Cranesbill. Cobia Scandens. Tanagra. Sweet Sultan. Flax. Phlox. Larkspur.

It would have given him pleasure if I had been able to remember the Latin name of just one of them, but there, in his living quarters, lessons were out of the question. So Larkspur remained Larkspur. In the Green Hut Tyler demanded work and obedience; the smallest sign of what he called slackness would be punished by a rap over the knuckles with a knotted yew branch that hung on a hook beside the cupboard where he kept the rulers and exercise books. In his two rooms slackness was ignored and he demanded only quiet and company.

He spread honey—given him by a beekeeping friend—on a slice of toast, toasted in front of the gas fire, and he offered it to me on a hand-painted plate.

The plate was decorated by a friend of mine, he said. You recognize the plant?



"It keeps it out of sight when we're not watching it."

Not yet, sir.

The flower of the so-called strawberry tree.

Strawberries on a tree, sir?

He didn't bother to reply.

Tyler made drawings. Always with an HB pencil. Sketches of Tudor cottages, churches, driveways, willow trees, sheep, delphiniums. Some of his drawings he had printed on postcards.

Do you sell them, sir?

I print them for my friends. This way I can offer them a little present.

Nobody can help him, I told myself, as I sat in the wicker chair before his gas fire, rubbing my chilblains and eating my toast and honey. He's too old and he has too many hairs growing out of his body.

Pasiphaë on her two sticks is crossing the reception. People make way for her, and, when she stops to regain her breath, they move around her as if she were a natural landmark. It is her effrontery that puts them at ease.

Did she die?

Who are you talking about? Tyler asked.

I nodded toward a photograph by his bed.

Never, never talk, he said, about what you see on somebody's bedside table. Study it if you want to—he picked up the framed photograph and put it in my hands—remember it if you like, but say nothing, for there's nothing to be said. Nothing.

At last, the TV star arrives. People have been standing in the street outside the hotel for almost an hour in the hope of catching a glimpse of her. She is tiny, even smaller than they thought, perfect, with tumbling black hair, wearing silver. Cameras flash on all sides. We all of us hope to find—in this impromptu, unscreened moment—something beyond the fame, something that equalizes. For example, the fact that she, too, farts, like us. Meanwhile, we are also waiting for the opposite to happen: she has so much perfection, much more than any single person needs, so she could throw us some!

Tyler takes a pad out of his pocket and begins to draw one of the trees in the hotel lounge.

It is at this moment, as he begins to draw, that I remember the immensity of his solitude. Perhaps with me, given my age, he felt no need to mask or hide it. Anyway, his glasses magnified the solitude expressed in his eyes. The man who taught me to write was the first person to make me aware of irreparable loss.

Pasiphaë is returning on her crutches from the Velázquez bar. Did she have a drink there? When she reaches her chair, she has the problem of lowering herself. Telegonus is at the ready, but it is safer to have a man on each side, so she glances at Tyler, who, straightaway, comes and places one of his huge hands under her colossal elbow.

Are you an artist, señor?

No, it's a pastime, señora.

The TV star, accompanied by a guitarist, has started to sing. She sings simply, her eyes almost shut, her silver hips almost still, her lips almost touching the microphone:

> On a tree trunk
> A young girl, jubilant,
> Carved her name. . . .
> You are she who cut into my bark. . . .

Tyler died, in his fifties, soon after the Second World War.

His death involved a story about a gas fire, or a house burning down, or an accident with a car left running in a garage with the doors shut. I have forgotten the details because they suggested that the methodical, tidy, gruffly shy man, who believed that quality mattered more than anything else in the world, died—or even put an end to his days—through indifference or carelessness.

We'll be leaving shortly, Circe whispers, standing at his elbow. It's a big car and there's plenty of room for your luggage.

I have very little, señora.

Like this, will you draw our horses? Pasiphaë asks him.

When you shade a drawing, you do not scribble. Is that clear, Berger? You shade carefully, putting one line beside the next and the next and the next. Then you crosshatch, and like this your lines weave the sketch together. The verb: to weave. Past participle?

Woven, sir.

Juan comes up behind me, puts his hands over my eyes, and demands: Who is it? ♦

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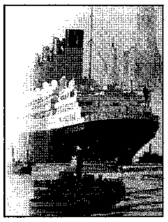
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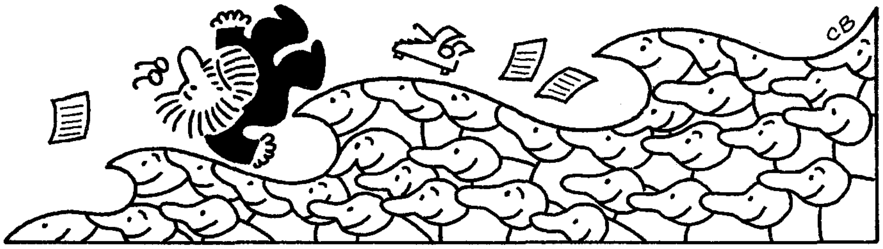


BOOKS

CONDITIONAL SURRENDER

What wives are for, and other marital morasses.

BY REBECCA MEAD

A hundred and sixty years ago in Arkansas, a man found himself in need of a wife, and placed a plainspoken but eloquent advertisement in his local newspaper: "Any gal what got a bed, calico dress, coffee-pot and skillet, knows how to cut our britches, can make a hunting shirt, and knows how to take care of children, can have my services till death parts both of us."

In mid-nineteenth-century Arkansas, it was clear what a wife was for, as it has been for much of the long history of matrimony. What a wife is for in the early twenty-first century is, however, less obvious. Contemporary wives have to intuit their job descriptions rather than read them in help-wanted ads, a situation that leaves a lot of room for misunderstanding. Indeed, it may be that if the job description of wife were spelled out in full no sensible woman would apply.

So, at least, you might conclude after browsing through the pile of books about marriage that have, like blushing spring brides, recently appeared in the nation's bookstores. These books can be found in all departments, from self-help ("The Surrendered Wife," by Laura Doyle, "The Marriage Sabbatical," by Cheryl Jarvis, and "Surrendering to Marriage," by Iris Krasnow), to economics ("The Price of Motherhood," by Ann Crittenden) and history ("A History of the Wife," by Marilyn Yalom). Each of these books takes as its ideal reader the discontented wife; the question that lingers after you read them is whether there can be any other kind.

Laura Doyle is one of those astonishing, self-created demagogues whose central creed is the universal applicability of their own experience. She is thirty-four and worked in marketing before she became a self-help author. She married at twenty-two, and the relationship was in trouble after four years, during which time she began nagging her husband about earning more money, criticizing him for watching too much television, and complaining about the way he parked the car and loaded the dishwasher. When none of her agitation produced the marital bliss she had signed up for, Doyle ceased trying to change her husband and instead changed herself, becoming that enlightened being of her own coinage, a "surrendered wife."

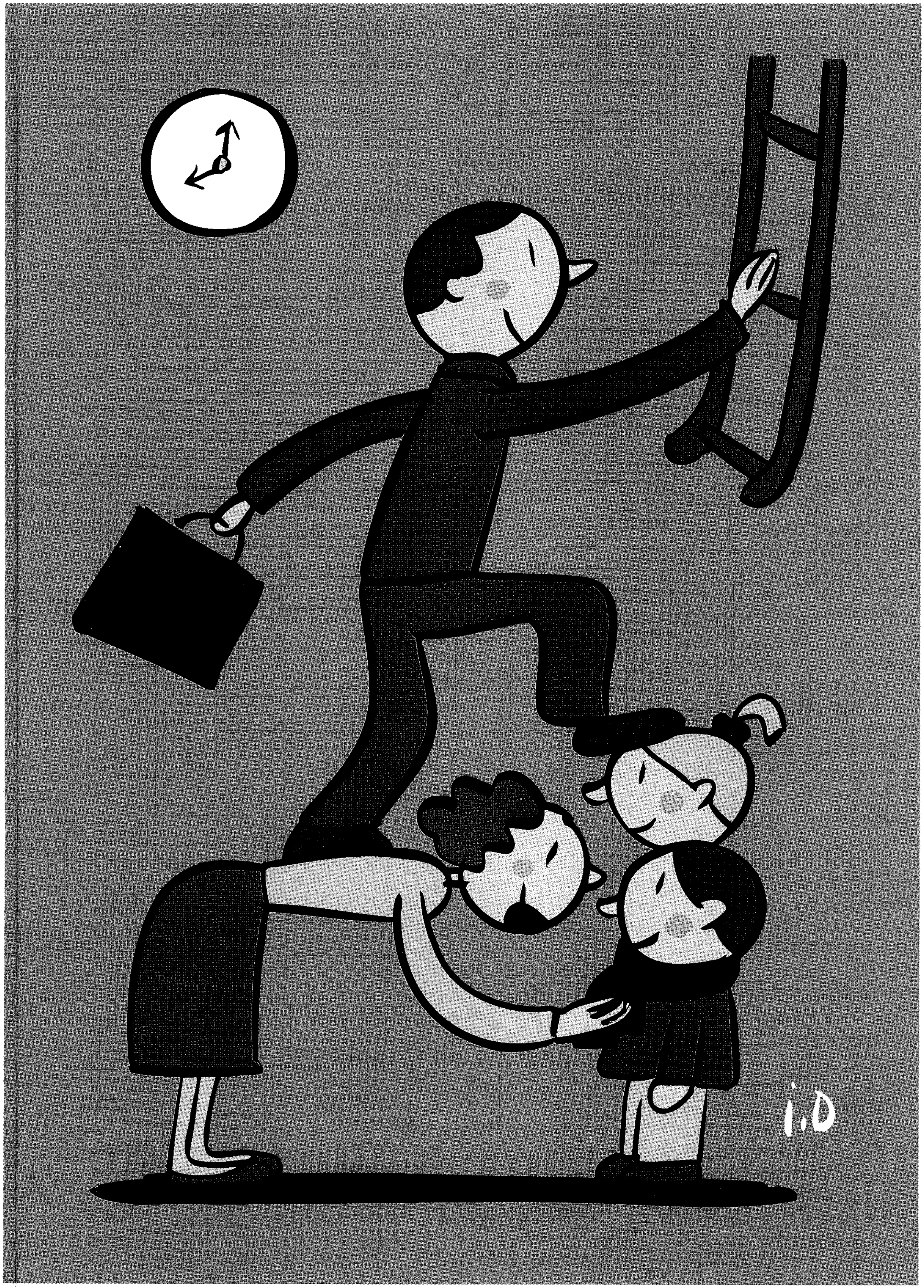
A surrendered wife, according to Doyle, does not exert "inappropriate control" over her husband; she leaves all decision-making up to him, and she smilingly expresses her gratitude and appreciation for everything he does. She also grants him sole custody of the checkbook, and has sex with him at least once a week, whether she feels like it or not. (Doyle says that when she's not in the mood herself it helps get the juices flowing if she plays an old Steely Dan album. To each her own.) She refrains from correcting him when he makes a mistake, such as driving for miles beyond his appointed freeway exit, and if she does overstep the mark she apologizes. If he actually seeks her opinion about something, she should, in the interests of allowing his natural dominance to develop, respond with a deflective "Whatever you think" or a chirpy "That's a good question!"

"The Surrendered Wife" (Simon & Schuster; $13) is dazzlingly reductive: in less than three hundred pages, Doyle provides an instruction manual for a new generation of Stepford wives. This was a strategy that worked for John Gray with his best-seller "Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus," upon which "The Surrendered Wife" is loosely modelled; and it may well work for Doyle, particularly since Gray was kind enough to provide her with a cover endorsement. (As Gray did, Doyle is building a brand: she has a Web site, Surrenderedwife.com; she offers one-on-one "relationship training"; she encourages wives to form support groups, or "surrendered circles"; and she promises a "prequel," to be entitled "The Surrendered Single.")

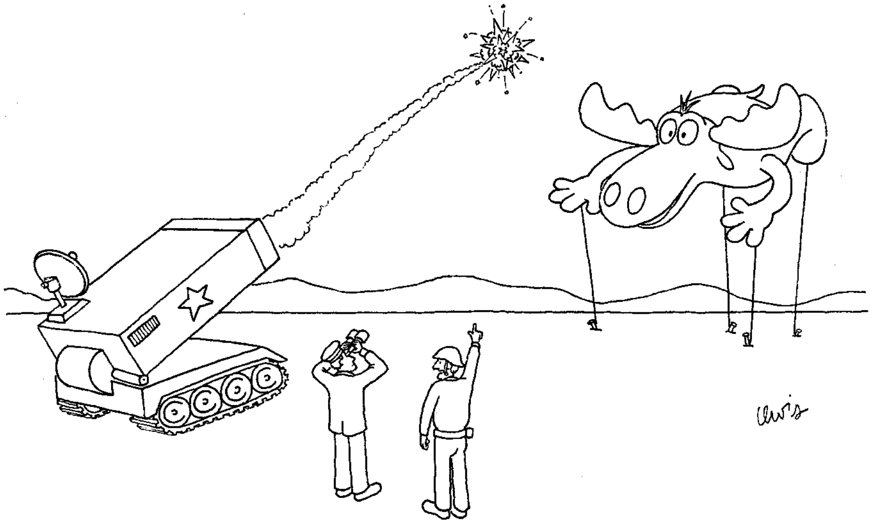
"The Surrendered Wife" also bears a family resemblance to another phenomenon in contemporary publishing, that of evangelical women's literature. Doyle originally published the book herself, two years ago, giving it the subtitle "A Woman's Spiritual Guide to True Intimacy with a Man"; the new edition replaces that subtitle with "A Practical Guide to Finding Intimacy, Passion, and Peace with a Man," practicality presumably beating out spirituality in Simon & Schuster's marketing meetings. All the same, it joins a shelfload of books that give a prescription for wifely conduct according to the Christian concept of submission, taking Jesus' willingness to suffer on the Cross as the paradigm of devout behavior. "When you surrender to your husband, you accept that a supreme being is looking after you both," she writes. But in fact Doyle preserves the husk of conservatism without the kernel of conviction. In her scheme, it turns out, a woman doesn't surrender as part of a larger commitment of faith; she surrenders in order to get what she wants. The book ostensibly encourages wives to respect their husbands rather than control them, but in reality it encourages wifely manipulation by other, sneakier means.

And what kind of marriage do women want? Doyle says that what she wants is "to be treasured, pampered, protected and adored." A wife wants a

ISABELLE DERVAUX



According to Laura Doyle, a properly "surrendered wife" should leave all decisions to her husband, along with the checkbook.



“Congratulations, General. The anti-missile system wasn’t fooled by the decoy balloon.”

• •

restoration of romance, a return to the days of dating, when her husband made the plans and picked up the check. She wants a husband who knows his own mind, and doesn’t depend upon her for guidance. That means never offering any guidance, even when he protests and says things like “I thought we were a team.” (An exception to the rule that a wife must surrender to her husband is, apparently, when the husband disagrees with the principle of wifely surrender.)

And yet there is a lot in “The Surrendered Wife” with which the most liberal marriage counsellor would have no argument. Don’t try to enforce your will on your spouse; respect your spouse’s thinking; be gracious to your spouse—these are all sensible guidelines for married life, particularly if they are mutually observed. Why should these sensible sentiments fall under the rubric of “surrender”? The emergence of this marital buzzword is part of a culture-wide disillusionment with the kind of feminism that urged women to be conquerors. Such disillusionment may be long overdue: having it all was, surely, only an opening bid in the feminist negotiation. What the success of books like “The Surrendered Wife” suggests is a much larger marital malaise, of which they are a symptom rather than a cure. The marriages that Doyle seeks to remedy are filled with bickering and disappointment: with husbands who ignore their wives in favor of work or golf; with wives who condescend to their husbands by treating them like children. The condition of marriage as Doyle describes it is pretty bleak; it is also remarkably consonant with the condition of marriage as described by Cheryl Jarvis in her book “The Marriage Sabbatical: The Journey That Brings You Home” (Perseus; $24).

Like Doyle, Jarvis thinks the institution of marriage is in serious trouble, not just among couples who divorce but among those who do not. The greatest suffering is endured, she believes, by wives, whose lives are inevitably riven with compromise, regret, and a sense of missed opportunity: in “The Marriage Sabbatical,” every wife is Ibsen’s Nora. If Doyle’s prescription is to crack down on the rules, Jarvis’s is to loosen up on them. “How do we stay married to one person for a long time when the only constant in life is change?” Jarvis asks. The unasked question that haunts her inadvertently demoralizing pages is “Why would we want to?”

Jarvis’s notion of taking a sabbatical from marriage occurred to her during the first quarter century of her own marriage, during which time she raised two children and worked as a journalist and editor in St. Louis, where her husband has a psychotherapy practice. She turned down an opportunity to work in New Haven, Connecticut, for three months when she was thirty-eight because her sons, then ten and fourteen, asked her not to. At forty-eight, she could wait no longer, and by then she had begun to conceive of the sabbatical as a new marital paradigm that would give a woman room to escape for a while without renouncing her vows. Her metaphor is drawn from Mosaic law, which required land to lie fallow every seven years “as a Sabbath to the Lord.” “What would happen if we looked to nature and let our marriages rest for a while in order to regenerate?” Jarvis asks. “What would happen if we took time out for an invigorating experience, focused on human fulfillment?”

Jarvis interviewed fifty-five women who did just that, though they might not have characterized their actions in such flawless personal-growth jargon. Each of their stories sounds like the premise for a movie: “Shirley Valentine” without the sex. There’s Shelly, who left her husband, her son, and three jobs in order to study yoga in India for six weeks; Chris, who, having shelved her post-collegiate plans to join the Peace Corps when she married, revived them thirty years later and did a two-year tour of duty in Namibia; Susan, who took herself to the South of France for six months with a trunkload of books from the Western canon. For her own sabbatical, Jarvis took off on a three-month tour of writers’ colonies. Landing at the first, on an island off the coast of Washington State, she discovered the bliss of having a room of her own, a Victorian claw-footed bathtub, and someone else to do the cooking. “One minute I’m feeling grateful to Jim for his support of this experience,” she writes of her husband. “Thirty minutes later, I’m sitting at the floral upholstered window seat, sipping apricot tea in a cup of hand-crafted pottery, wondering why I need a husband and a home at all.”

One doesn’t need to be a married woman to find this kind of escape fantasy alluring; and the desire that Jarvis felt to do something out of her ordinary routine may be mostly a matter of being middle-aged. Still, according to Jarvis’s diagnosis, marriage—even the strongest of marriages—is predicated upon wifely confinement. Marriage means living in a place you don’t like because it suits your husband: her book is populated with women in the Ozarks, Alaska, and the

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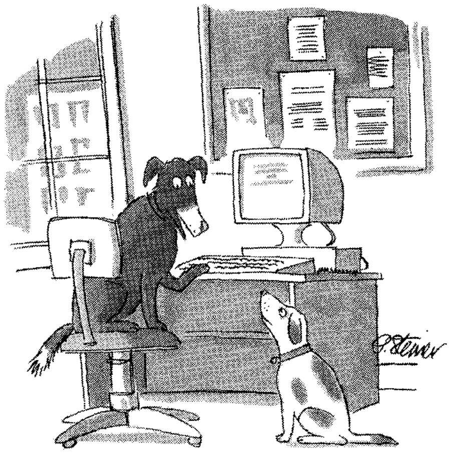

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rural East Coast, all itching to be elsewhere. Marriage means cooking and cleaning and answering children's phone calls when you'd rather be working. "If married women are going to fulfill their dreams, they will sometimes have to say 'I can't take care of you right now,'" Jarvis writes. "Saying no to others is saying yes to something deeper within ourselves." Jarvis expresses her desire for marriage to be thought of as a "mutual personal-growth contract"; and behind this infelicitous expression lies the idea that marriage amounts to a defense against the existential trials of individualism, and happiness consists in carving out a space for personal development within its potentially obliterating structure. "At its most fundamental level," she writes, "isn't marriage just a way to buffer ourselves against the reality that we are essentially alone in the world?"

Well, no; owning a dog is just a way to buffer ourselves against the reality that we are essentially alone in the world. Marriage, among other things, is a structure within which children can be efficiently raised; it's a means of gaining cultural approbation, not to mention plates that match your teacups; and—crucially—it's an economic arrangement. Those economic aspects receive sobering treatment in "The Price of Motherhood" (Metropolitan; $25), by Ann Crittenden. Her focus is on mothers rather than on wives, but the degree of overlap is considerable. Crittenden, a former *Times* reporter, says that in contemporary American society becoming a mother provides a woman with her best shot at diminishing her earning power, compromising her future financial security, and undermining her social status. Having become a mother herself eighteen years ago, when she was in her early forties—she left her job at the *Times* to raise her son—she makes a case for motherhood not as biological destiny or as a necessarily self-sacrificing vocation but as a vastly important and wildly underappreciated contribution to the wealth of nations.

Crittenden compares the work that mothers do to the national service performed by soldiers, which is amply rewarded with grants for education and with health care and pensions, as well as with respect. By contrast, mothers are stiffed left and right—by the structure of Social Security, by inflexible work schedules, by inadequate child-care provisions, and by unfair divorce laws. Crittenden provides a raft of proposals of ways in which these inequities might be corrected: a "child allowance" would replace the current system of child tax credits; mothers would earn Social Security credits for the labor of raising children; employers would provide a year's salaried parental leave. All this would be paid for, Crittenden says, by an unspecified combination of taxes and reallocation of federal resources, and she points to the examples of countries such as Sweden to suggest how it might be done.

Crittenden proposes that, once a married couple have children, their individual incomes should legally merge into a "family wage," which neither partner can claim sole ownership of, and which would remain in effect for as long as there are dependent children around, divorce or no. For the divorce court, in her view, is where cultural assumptions about the place of wives are laid bare. Matrimonial law generally assumes that women provide wifely services—raising children, supporting their husbands' careers—out of love, and so are due no financial recompense for their efforts should the marriage go bad. Instead, she suggests, stay-at-home wives might be considered equal investors in a partnership. This is a perspective that has yet to make much impact in practice. As Gary Wendt, the multimillionaire former C.E.O. of G.E. Capital, remarked a few years ago during his celebrated divorce from his wife, Lorna, "My rewards were financial, and I think her rewards were perhaps emotional." One wishes that the judge had suggested to Gary Wendt that if he expected to keep his money he would also be obliged to maintain his end of the bargain, and keep loving his wife.

Where Crittenden and the other authors focus on the dissatisfactions of contemporary wifehood, Marilyn Yalom, in "A History of the Wife" (HarperCollins; $30), shows that such dissatisfactions have a long history. Divorce was common in ancient Rome; wealthy girls in the early Middle Ages rebelled against the husbands chosen for them by their families. In Colonial New England, divorce was more often instituted by wives than by husbands;

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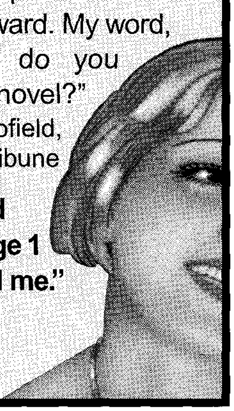

"What I loved about it was that everyone has a story, and I do mean everyone, and those stories converge and seed one another and assuage deep sorrow and move life forward. My word, what more do you want from a novel?"
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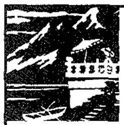

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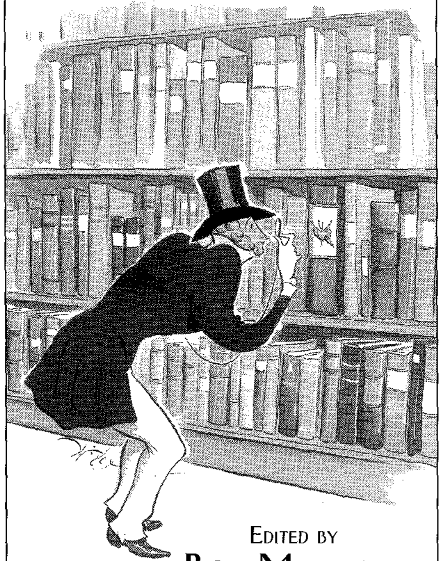

EDITED BY BOB MANKOFF

From the stunning and the sublime to the purple and pretentious, here, in 104 drawings, are dead-on portraits and eye-opening ruminations on all things bookish, writerly, and readerly as illuminated by renowned *New Yorker* cartoonists, including Charles Barsotti, Roz Chast, Ed Koren and Victoria Roberts.

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Yalom cites the suit of one woman whose husband admitted "that he had Rogered other women and meant to Roger Every Likely Woman He Could and as many as would Let Him." Yalom's book doesn't quite live up to its billing—she ignores wifedom beyond the Western tradition—and a reader can feel as wearied by the account of centuries of cooking, cleaning, and childbearing as the women who performed those drudgeries must have. Fortunately, it is enlivened by delightful nuggets of primary-source material, including the Arkansas bride-wanted advertisement. Yalom makes a point of showing that unsurrendered brides have been arguing with the wedding-service injunction to obey their husbands since the Book of Common Prayer was written; these refuseniks include Elizabeth Cady Stanton and, almost two hundred years earlier, a Virginia woman named Sarah Harrison Blair, who, during the marriage ceremony, repeatedly insisted, "No obey," eventually obliging the minister to cave.

A chorus of wifely dissatisfaction may echo throughout history, yet the reasons for the dissatisfaction have changed critically. Yalom's historical wives were protesting marriage laws that rendered them their husbands' chattel; that delivered their property to the men they married; that denied them a vote, because they were, supposedly, covered by their husbands' political views; that decreed their bodies perpetually available to their husbands, the dangers of childbearing or the whims of inclination aside. And today? The new batch of marriage books suggest that today's women are betrayed by great expectations—they expect matrimony to provide them with happiness, something that may be much harder to achieve than extending the franchise to women or outlawing marital rape.

"My fantasy of marriage as a wellspring of contentment has completely disappeared, and so should yours," Iris Krasnow sternly advises her readers in "Surrendering to Marriage" (Talk Miramax; $22.95). Krasnow's gloss on surrender differs from Doyle's: what she has in mind is mutual submission to the institution, as "a commitment we made, a spiritual promise larger than our own selfish desires." Surrendering means deciding to stand by one's vows even when boredom becomes the dominant theme of a marriage; giving up the hope that marriage will provide perpetual elation; learning to live with less than great sex, or with no sex at all. Unlike Doyle, who assumes that sex is a service women provide to men, Krasnow cites several instances of husbands who are derelict in their conjugal duties, including one who has never wanted to have sex with his wife more than once a year but has nonetheless managed to become a father of three, a triumph of chance over probability.

Krasnow is a regular contributor to the Washington *Post*, and her book reads like an oversized piece for the Style section. She admits that the "best stuff" in her book comes from her "extended circle of friends around Washington, D.C., journalists, artists, nurses, doctors, lawyers, waitresses, heiresses," which is another way of saying that she's been too busy looking after her four young sons to do much research. And her conclusions are delivered with a kind of hands-on-hips swagger. "I'll tell you the four things I now know about marriage," she writes. "A. Marriage can be hell; B. The grass is not greener on the other side; C. Savor the highs, because one thing you can count on—the dips are just around the corner; and D. Nobody is perfect, so you may as well love the one you're with."

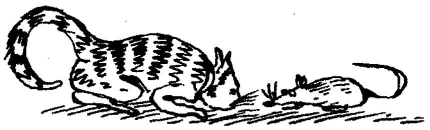
Still, Krasnow does get at something that the other discontented-wives books don't: that marriage does not provide happiness (though it can often provide an environment in which to experience happiness), and that it is not an exhilarating private journey of self-discovery but a mode of living in the social world. That's a long way from Laura Doyle's Stations of the Cross model of wifely self-sacrifice. One way to reimagine marriage might be to substitute an alternative religious metaphor, that of churchgoing—which has, at its center, something sublime, but which consists mostly of entering a community and participating routinely in a set of social practices that can be observed without too much thought about their higher significance. Marriage, too, is an expression of a desire to wed the rational to the irrational: it is the most sensible, practical way of living in the world that has thus far been devised and, at the same time, life's most improbable undertaking. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Paradise Park, *by Allegra Goodman (Dial; $24.95).* Goodman's earlier fiction was wry, intuitive, and possessed of a nineteenth-century sensibility. This new novel, which demonstrates her range but not her depth, records the pell-mell peregrinations of one Sharon Spiegelman—earnest, silly, and given to exclamatory remarks—whose search for love and spiritual fulfillment (the latter prompted by a vision of God during a whale watch) takes her from Cambridge to Hawaii, and then, via Jerusalem and Crown Heights, back to Massachusetts, where she makes peace with her Jewish roots. The resulting picaresque, unsubtle and overlong but not without a certain inner propulsion, feels like a book that Goodman (herself an observant Jew who lives in Cambridge) needed to write.

Carry Me Home, *by Diane McWhorter (Simon & Schuster; $35).* Born and raised in a prominent white family in Birmingham, McWhorter was ten years old when a bomb blew up the city's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four black girls. The incident was one of the flash points of Birmingham's civil-rights conflict, in which activists like Martin Luther King, Jr., lined up against hard-line segregationists like Bull Connor, a former radio sportscaster who had become the city's Commissioner of Public Safety. Many of the elements here, from King's marches to Connor's police dogs, are familiar, but McWhorter's own involvement in the story—her father became increasingly racist, possibly even joining the Klan—reënergizes the struggle, serving as a reminder that history is always personal.

Our Word Is Our Weapon, *by Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (Seven Stories; $27.95).* Seven years ago, Marcos appeared suddenly on the world's stage as the spokesman—either terrorist or hero, depending on one's politics—of an indigenous uprising in the impoverished Mexican state of Chiapas. This eccentric collection of writings, which includes everything from the Zapatistas' declaration of war to magic-realist stories about a beetle named Durito, proves Marcos to be a passionate and surprisingly self-deprecating writer. Most ingenious are his attempts to combat economic globalization in rural Mexico by appealing to trade unionists in Italy and punk rockers in the United States.



Milosz's ABC's, *by Czeslaw Milosz, translated from the Polish by Madeline G. Levine (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $24).* The short prose entries in this quiet book take note of some of the people and places and ideas that contributed to the making of Milosz. The subjects of his sketches range from Alchemy and Curiosity to Rimbaud and Whitman, from childhood friends to Polish intellectuals little known in the West. But what could have been no more than a light memory work becomes almost a registry of gratitude: a meditation on the obligations of having lived a life and the responsibilities inherent in its particulars.

On Bullfighting, *by A. L. Kennedy (Anchor; $11).* Kennedy describes the Spanish bullfight, or *corrida*, with the same masochistic honesty and odd sense of humor that she brings to her novels. "On Bullfighting" begins with the author on a windowsill, and, except for the evidence of the completed book, it's easy to believe that she means to jump. The reasons for this are revealed slowly, amid much information about the *corrida*, including histories of the great matadors, the breeding of the *toros bravos*, and the psychology of the bullfight: "There's nothing like the death of a well-loved torero for showing the aficionado an uncomfortable self-portrait." Similarly, Kennedy's brilliant descriptions of the action in the ring are studded with sharp bits of autobiographical suspense, allowing us to take pleasure, like the audience at the *corrida*, in the artful communication of suffering.

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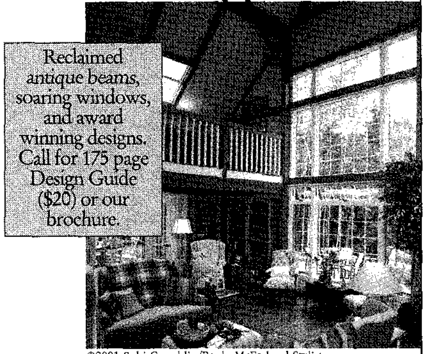

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ON TELEVISION

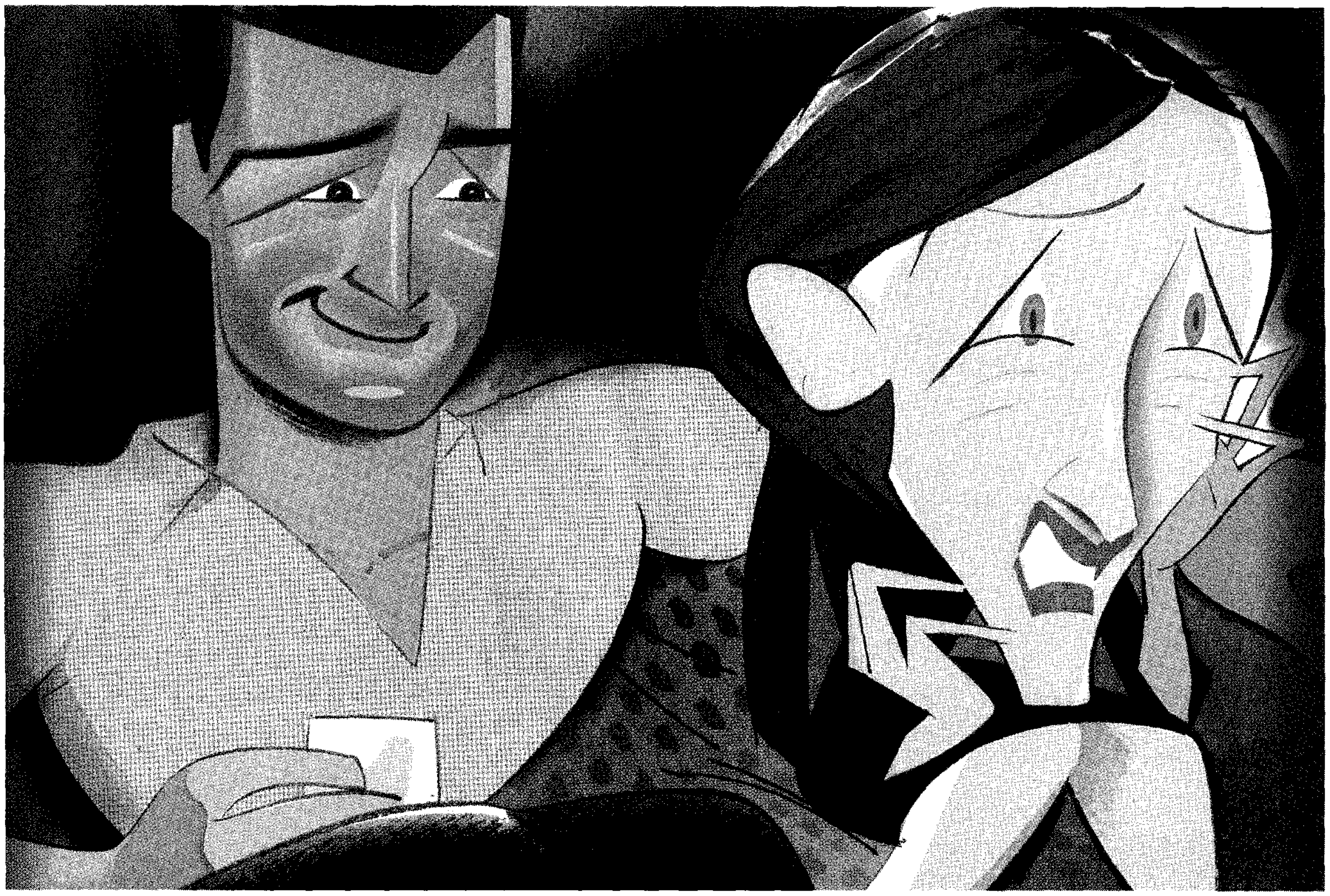
OUR MISS CUSACK

A star vehicle that isn't running on empty.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

This hasn't been a great season to be a movie or TV star—at least, not if you're a star with a new sitcom. The recent cancellation of "Bette," as in Midler, only added to the number of last fall's customized celebrity-driven vehicles that were towed to the junk yard, among them the crumpled wrecks belonging to Michael Richards, John Goodman, and Gabriel Byrne. The list should by rights also include "The Geena Davis Show," but that purgatorial half hour has mysteriously, maddeningly eluded my telepathic efforts to cancel it. (Now that "Cursed" has been renamed "The Weber Show"—not that it smells any sweeter for it—perhaps the discarded name should be transferred to Davis's show.) I have watched a combined total of twenty or so episodes of the above shows, more than enough to notice that what they all lacked, among other things, was good ensemble writing. And in some ways the fact that they had stars of one magnitude or another at their center no doubt hurt as much as it helped. No one wants to be known as the person who screwed it up for Bette Midler, just as no doctor wants to be known as the person who failed to cure a famous patient. It looks bad, and people remember. So it's quite possible that writers, out of terror and timidity, didn't take their best shots in these shows, and that producers, for the same reason, didn't intervene in time or in the right way. And maybe, in some cases, the stars themselves were spooked by the burden of carrying a show alone and of being sparkling and funny week in and week out. The causes of failure are often many, but one thing that can go a long way toward promoting success on television is a certain quality of modesty—the professional equivalent of emotional intelligence, which could be called egotistical intelligence. It's a sense of proportion, a sense of how you fit into the group. Mary Tyler Moore had it, and so did Carroll O'Connor and Michael J. Fox. They looked good in part because they made other people look good. You see it in "Friends" still, and in "Will & Grace," which could have fallen apart this season, after the two supporting actors won Emmy Awards and the two leads went home empty-handed, but didn't. Because of this emphasis on the ensemble, TV stars rarely become movie stars, but movie stars can often learn to be TV stars, just as a kid whose teacher writes "Frequently disturbs class" on his report card can often learn, with some effort, to be a kid who "Plays well with others."

When it comes to women stars and sitcoms, the longest shadow—it's almost inescapable—is, of course, the one cast by Lucille Ball, whose genius was to fre-



Everybody loves Joan: Cusack is the first worthy heir to Lucille Ball's throne to come along in a good while.

quently disturb class and play well with others at the same time. Joan Cusack isn't trying to be Lucy in her new ABC sitcom, "What About Joan" (what about the question mark, I ask), which premières this week, but she is the first worthy heir to the throne to come along in a good while. "What About Joan" is not a great show, but it is free of the element of humiliation, of condescension and comeuppance, that marked some of last fall's sitcom duds (to say nothing of "I Love Lucy"). Cusack is never anything less than delightful and unexpected, just as she is in her movies. By temperament, she's not a screen hog (although she played a wickedly comic one in "Addams Family Values," as a woman who marries and then tries to kill Uncle Fester for his fortune). She is almost always cast as the heroine's best friend—the kind of character we still think of, with approval and great affection, as "the Eve Arden character"—but she can hold her own at the center of things as well. In fact, that's the job definition of a character actress: to appear a little bit kooky but to be possibly the sanest one in a group (viz. Thelma Ritter). It may be no accident that Cusack's character on "What About Joan," Joan Gallagher, is a high-school English teacher: that's what Eve Arden played on the radio and TV series "Our Miss Brooks." (And so competent an actor was she that she was actually offered teaching jobs.)

In the first couple of episodes, "What About Joan," which is set, and filmed, in Chicago, revolves around Joan's romantic dilemma. Jake, the man she's been dating for six weeks (Kyle Chandler), has asked her to marry him and thereby rocked her world for better and for worse. Such are Cusack's timing and gift for physical comedy—for being awkward and uncomfortable and all over the place while somehow still managing to be oddly dignified, like a cross between Mary Richards and Roseanne Roseannadanna—that even at this early stage I've seen at least one moment, and maybe two, that I would call classic. Cusack does all the things your mother told you not to do: she slouches, touches her face, squints, moves her hands a lot, and she's utterly winning while doing them. She has a good foil for her goofiness in Chandler (of "Early Edition"). Jake's a handsome, straightforward, solid fellow—he's a banker, and a throwback in looks and manner to the days when men tucked their shirts in some of the time—and he's made it pretty clear that there's nothing Joan can do that will make him not be in love with her. This, of course, sends her into a tizzy: they've only been on nine dates, and, as she tells him, trying to make him see reason, they haven't even used the word "love" yet, and "there's an order to these things—alcohol, sex, love, marriage, separation, divorce, alcohol."

Cusack is adorable no matter what she does, especially when she's in distress. In one scene, a new student teacher tries to give Joan some tips about her sex life and prepares to render a picture of the female anatomy to help her out. Joan, her brow wrinkling furiously, cries out in alarm, "Don't . . . don't . . . don't . . . *draw!*" But some of the writing for the other characters—Joan's two best friends, played by Donna Murphy and Jessica Hecht, and a fellow-teacher, played by Wallace Langham—is as conventional and stale as sitcom writing gets. And Langham's part—he dates one of Joan's friends and exists solely to be the bad boyfriend, as opposed to Chandler's good boyfriend—is just awful. For some reason, nearly every sitcom seems to think it must have at least one character who is a complete idiot. James L. Brooks, one of the executive producers of "What About Joan," was the co-creator of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," but the complete idiot he's responsible for here is no Ted Baxter.

There's room for improvement in "What About Joan," but Cusack is the right star at the right time in what may turn out to be the right show. The show gets her, and gets that the audience loves her. (Practically everyone I know can quote a Joan Cusack line from one of her movies, from "Broadcast News" and "Working Girl" to "Grosse Pointe Blank" and "Arlington Road.") The show is, to say the very least, a relief from all the wasted wattage and the gummed-up career calculations that were inflicted on viewers last season. When Joan is late meeting Jake at a restaurant and the waiter remarks on her tardiness, Jake says to him, "Wait till you meet her. You'll be on her side in thirty seconds." Close enough, but don't expect it to take quite that long. ♦

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THE SKY LINE

SITE SPECIFICS

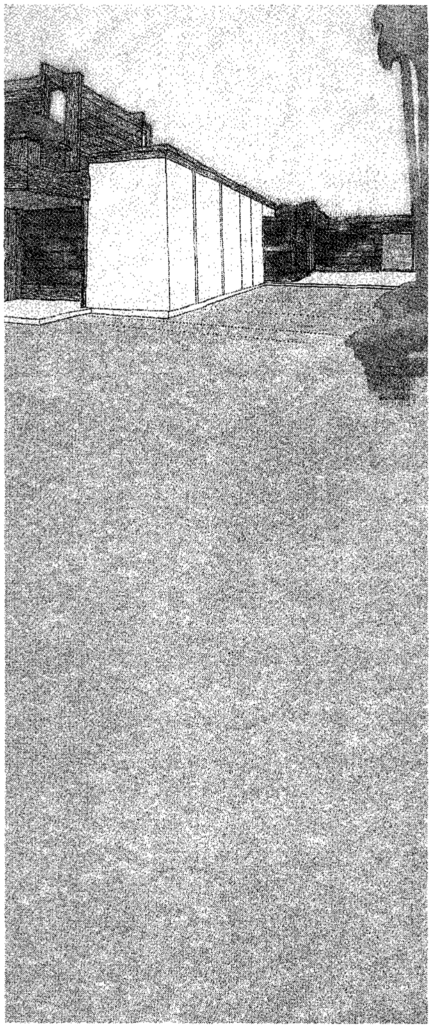
Two new shows in L.A. explore the legacy of early-modern architects.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

All the streams of modern architecture—the pure boxes of the International Style, the powerful lines and geometric shapes of Frank Lloyd Wright, the rhythmic façades of Secessionist Vienna, the agitated forms of German Expressionism—come together in the work of Rudolf Schindler, who practiced in California from 1920 until his death in 1953. Schindler has never got his due in the pantheon of twentieth-century architects, probably because he was such a synthesizer. He was omitted from Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock's seminal exhibition of modern architecture at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932, and he wasn't invited to design one of the famous Case Study houses in California in the late nineteen-forties, either. But he created two of the greatest houses of the twentieth century, the Lovell Beach House of 1926, in Newport Beach, California, and his own house on Kings Road in West Hollywood, which was completed in 1922.

The implicit premise of "The Architecture of R. M. Schindler," a generous exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, is that Schindler is worth paying attention to now for the same reason that he was denied widespread respect in his lifetime: his work is difficult to categorize. Hybrids seem more interesting than they once did. The curators of the show, Elizabeth A.T. Smith and Michael Darling, connect Schindler with a lot of architecture that didn't develop until decades after his death, including the work of Frank Gehry. This is a bit of a stretch, but if you look at Schindler's last major works—the Kallis House in Studio City, which was built in 1948, and the Janson Residence in Los Angeles, from 1949—the idea is not as odd as it might seem. The Kallis House, an exploded box with slanted walls and angled roofs and trapezoidal windows, does seem to prefigure the house Gehry built for himself in Santa Monica thirty years later. Both houses have a rough, unfinished quality. Like many modernists, Schindler wasn't interested in refinement, and he didn't obsess about materials. He cared about space and about shape, and he was more interested in experimenting with advanced construction techniques than in creating perfectly finished objects. A lot of his buildings seem like avant-garde camps.

This is true of the spectacular A-frame cabin Schindler built on a forested site at Lake Arrowhead in California in 1937 (it may be the first such use of that steep-gabled shape) and of the Rose



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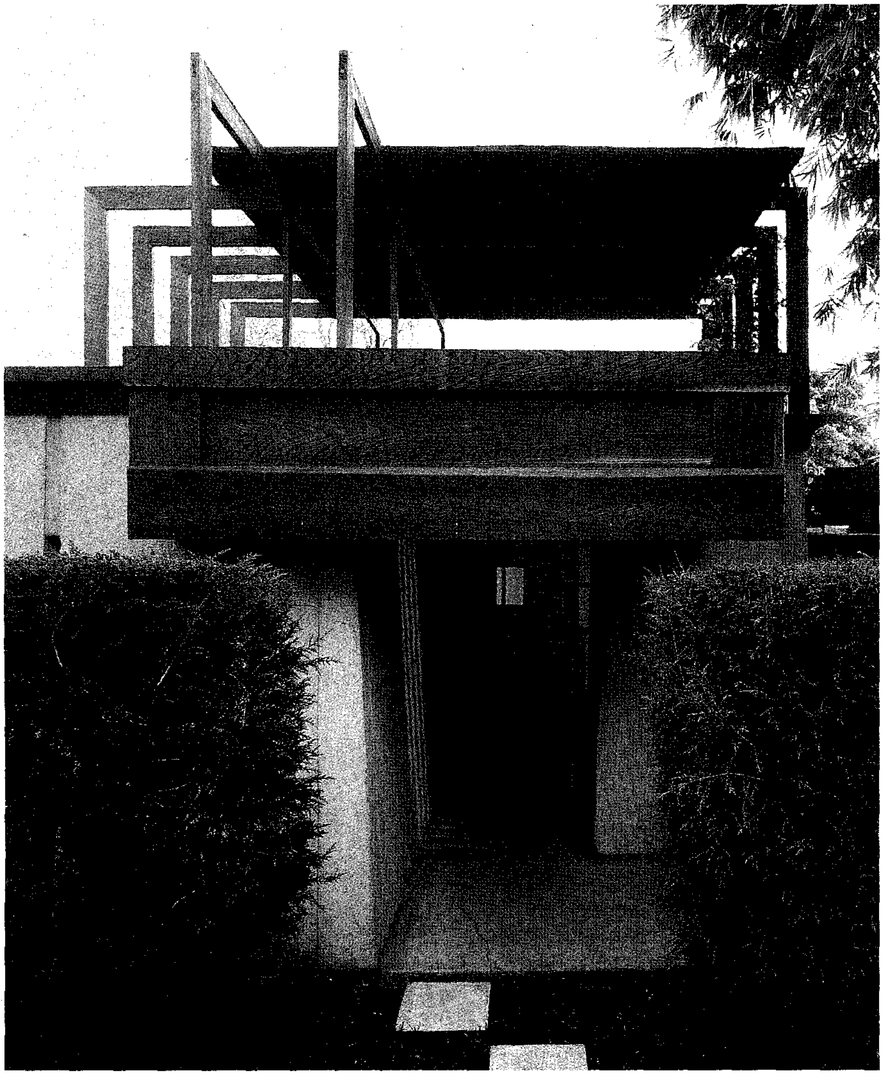
Beach Colony, an unrealized project of the same year for a set of wood-frame, stucco, and canvas cottages. (A full-scale mockup of one of the Rose cottages has been erected in the center of the Museum of Contemporary Art galleries.) But Schindler's ultimate modernist camp was surely his own house, which he and his wife, Pauline, built as an experiment in communal living with another couple, Marian and Clyde Chace. (The experiment didn't last; the Chaces moved out after two years, and three years after that Schindler and his wife separated, although they both continued to use the house.) The building is a pinwheel-shaped mélange of rooms and open courtyards, with a shared kitchen and private living rooms and work spaces. Sleeping quarters are open-air lofts, which Schindler dubbed "sleeping baskets," rather than enclosed bedrooms. The house is long and low, and it is constructed of wood, glass, and concrete panels that are tilted slightly inward. From a distance, it looks like a cross between a Southwestern pueblo and a house by Frank Lloyd Wright. It isn't particularly beautiful, but it has a raw power.

Schindler was born in Vienna in 1887. He studied with the modernist architects Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos, and in 1914 he emigrated to Chicago, where he was hired by Wright. Schindler went to Los Angeles to supervise the construction of Hollyhock House, Wright's great villa for the heiress Aline Barnsdall. He stayed and after a couple of years began working independently of Wright, but he never lost a sense of connection to his mentor. His work bridges American modernism and the purist sensibilities of the European modernists. Schindler had an instinctive talent for



The entrance and "sleeping basket" of the Chace studio at R. M. Schindler's house on Kings Road in West Hollywood. Opposite: the presentation drawing for the house.

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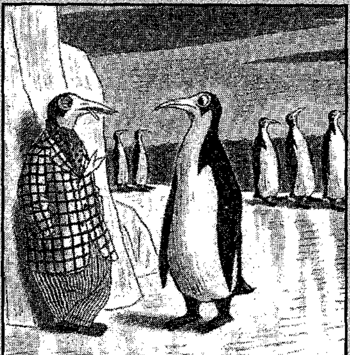

"I just got damn well fed up with being formal all the time."

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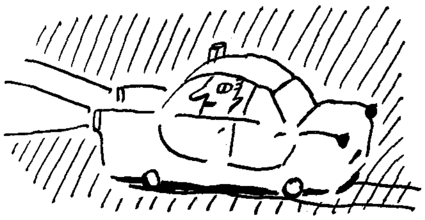
synthesis: he could unite the sleek and the funky, just as he could both remain true to Wright and go off on his own. (Most of Wright's followers either produced weak echoes of his work or rejected it entirely, as if running in the opposite direction were the only way to escape his power.)

Europeans of Schindler's generation who discovered Southern California in the nineteen-twenties thought of it as a kind of progressive Eden, and all of Schindler's buildings say something about the open, nurturing landscape that surrounds them. Schindler was always experimenting, yet his architecture never seems tentative or hesitant, and the more you look at it the more it seems curiously contemporary. He was no good at self-promotion, however. He had a naïve faith in the ability of architecture to enhance a progressive social agenda, and he also seems to have believed that the world would pay attention to better architectural forms simply because they were better. When a slightly younger fellow Austrian modernist, Richard Neutra, joined him in Los Angeles, Neutra took away Schindler's most valuable clients, the Philip Lovells, and used the house he built for them adjacent to Griffith Park—more elegant than Schindler's beach villa but not as inventive—as a platform for a kind of media stardom that Schindler himself never achieved. (Schindler later called Neutra a "go-getter type, whose main force is a shrewd understanding of the publicity market . . . poison to any real art development.")

Schindler's buildings are earthy rather than mannered or pretentious. The underground galleries at MOCA, which have been redesigned by the architects Annie Chu and Rick Gooding in a style that gently alludes to Schindler's, are full of spectacular models, vintage photographs, and original drawings. The handsomely designed book that accompanies the show includes an essay by Robert Sweeney on the bohemian ambience of the Kings Road house, where the Schindlers entertained prominent socialists, painters, poets, and various other artists, including the photographer Edward Weston and the writers Max Eastman and Theodore Dreiser. After the Chaces left, their studio was rented to a string of tenants—movie actors and scriptwriters, and, briefly, the composer John Cage. In 1927, Pauline moved to a utopian community founded by Theosophists in San Luis Obispo, and then to Carmel, where she edited and wrote for a leftist weekly before returning to Kings Road more or less permanently in the late nineteen-thirties.

The title page of Sweeney's essay is illustrated by a presentation drawing of the Kings Road house that looks far better on the gallery wall. The house is shown in perspective at the top of a narrow vertical panel, two-thirds of which is just a soft gray field. Frank Lloyd Wright's aesthetic, classic Japanese prints, and Viennese modernism are joined in graceful harmony. Schindler was twentieth-century architecture's most romantic modernist.

A show across town, "Shaping the Great City: Modern Architecture in Central Europe 1890-1937," at the J. Paul Getty Museum, is every bit as interesting as the Schindler exhibit, and more important as a work of scholarship. The title makes it sound hopelessly narrow, but in fact it is a wide-ranging look at the relationship between buildings, cities, culture, and identity. The show demonstrates that modern architecture worked its way relatively smoothly into the cultural mainstream of the cities of the Hapsburg Empire, where it was used to interpret a monumental and civilized metropolitan spirit. In Paris and London, on the other hand—not to mention New York—the new clashed with the old in the early years of the twentieth century. New architecture was presumed to be revolutionary. Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, for instance, was a complex of slablike towers set in open space that would have required the obliteration of the traditional pattern of streets, blocks, and squares. (It wasn't built, but it nonetheless served as the model for the modernist housing projects and office towers that made mincemeat of traditional



cities.) Americans and Western Europeans who embraced modernism rejected not only traditional architectural forms and shapes but the city as it had previously existed.

There was plenty of modern architecture in Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Zagreb, Krakow, and many smaller cities in Central Europe, and much of it was as good as, if not better than, the modernist buildings in Paris and Berlin and Amsterdam. But in the Central European cities the new buildings didn't seem at odds with everything around them. Paris had Le Corbusier, who wanted to blow everything up, and Vienna had Otto Wagner, whose buildings were rich, urbane, sophisticated, and dazzlingly imaginative, and proved that there could be a lively, modernist version of traditional monumentality. Wagner had tremendous influence as an urban theorist, and he may be the only important modern architect who consistently saw the city as a complex and living organism, not as a static set of forms. (Wagner's obsessive interest in the city didn't rub off on Schindler, but it's a fair guess that Wagner had something to do with Schindler's feelings about integration and synthesis.) Wagner has a major role in the Getty exhibition, as does Camillo Sitte, the Viennese urban-architectural theorist who wrote eloquently of the importance of squares, vistas, and public space in cities. Wagner was more of a modernist than Sitte, but "Shaping the Great City" gives both of them credit for forming the urban-centric sensibility of Central Europe.

Although Sitte is usually thought of as a conservative, even a reactionary, force in urban planning, the architectural historian Eve Blau, one of the show's curators, observes in a catalogue essay that the two men shared a sense of the city as an evolving cultural artifact: "For both Sitte and Wagner an underlying objective of urban design was to reconcile the new with the old, to bring the facts of modern urban life into harmony with traditional concepts of place-making." Wagner objected to the grandiose City Beautiful and suburbanizing Garden City movements, both of which were tremendously influential in Western Europe and in North America. He and Sitte, for all their differences, accepted the city as it was as a starting point.

"Shaping the Great City" was organized by the Getty Research Institute, the Kunstforum in Vienna, and the Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal, which, under the direction of Phyllis Lambert, has been one of the world's most determined sponsors of architectural scholarship. (The Getty, where the show remains on view through May 6th, is its only venue in the United States.) The abstract, spare installation by the Viennese architectural firm of Coop Himmelblau consists of a series of metal grids set on the diagonal and arranged to form small, open, roomlike spaces. These are filled with exquisite ink and chalk sketches, watercolors, and period photographs. There are drawings for new neighborhoods and districts by Wagner, Cubist-influenced buildings by Pavel Janak and Jiri Kroh, Bauhaus-like buildings by Farkas Molnar. Silent-film footage of street life in the early years of the twentieth century is projected continuously on panels hung from the metal framework.

The curators make no claims to consistency from one city to the next. (The new architecture tended to be crisper in Prague and more ornate in Krakow.) Blau argues that it was the very fluidity of the Hapsburg Empire, the constantly shifting jurisdictions and national borders, that led people to identify with cities more than with countries and made the metropolis the focus of cultural aspirations. But this doesn't explain why these cities, which had such difficulty achieving equilibrium on the political front, seem to have had no trouble at all with it architecturally. Every one of them embraced radical architecture while zealously preserving the traditional forms. Toward the end of the exhibition, there is a hauntingly beautiful image—a drawing from 1929 by Josef Gocar for a department store in Brno—that remained with me long after I left the museum. It is of a modern tower that looks something like Mies van der Rohe's glass-skyscraper projects of the same period. But where Mies's studies show his towers alone, with the city all but eliminated around them, Gocar has placed his new tower on an old square, amid palaces, and just beyond the shadow of a classical colonnade, looking as if it had always been there. ♦

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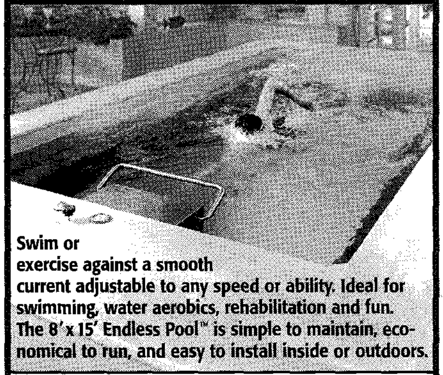

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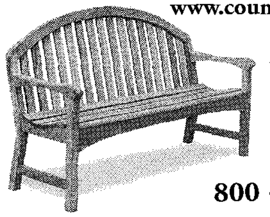

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LUST BE A LADY

David Mamet makes merry.

BY JOHN LAHR

In a serious playwright's hardworking, solitary life sometimes caprice arises. He gets light-headed; he starts to enjoy himself; he teases the hard-won gravity of his public persona and even his themes; he becomes a grinning, effervescent shadow of his renowned self. Tennessee Williams had one such slap-happy epiphany in "The Gnädiges Fräulein" (1965); Noël Coward in "Hands Across the Sea" (1936); and now, in "Boston Marriage" (at London's Donmar Warehouse), David Mamet appears before us in some giddy, exhilarating version of himself. It's as if the hard-nosed, cynical, fierce Mamet had gone to sleep reading Henry James and dreamed that he was some kind of butch dandy—a combination of Joe Orton and Ronald Firbank.

In "Boston Marriage," via the turn-of-the-century high jinks of two well-born, quarrelling lesbian lovers, Anna and Claire, and their maid, Catherine, Mamet sashays around the stage for ninety minutes in high-camp masquerade, using the pitch and roll of elegant, epigrammatic, highfalutin English to decoy the lower impulses. The issue is fucking; the idiom is fustian:

MAID: We do it up against a tree.
CLAIRE: Isn't that hard on the legs?
MAID: Perhaps. But the view is better.
CLAIRE: What in life is not a compromise.

Farcical detachment is a great comic game; and, on this score, it seems, Mamet can hold his own with past masters.

As the curtain rises, Anna (Zoë Wanamaker) reclines on a chaise longue, flaunting an emerald necklace at her paramour, Claire (Anna Chancellor). It is a gift from her patrician sugar daddy, whose patronage will allow the two chemise-lifters to continue their own liaison in the de-luxe manner to which they are accustomed. Claire asks Anna if the man knows about her sexual reputation:

ANNA: He has just returned from a long sojourn abroad.
CLAIRE: What? On the moon?

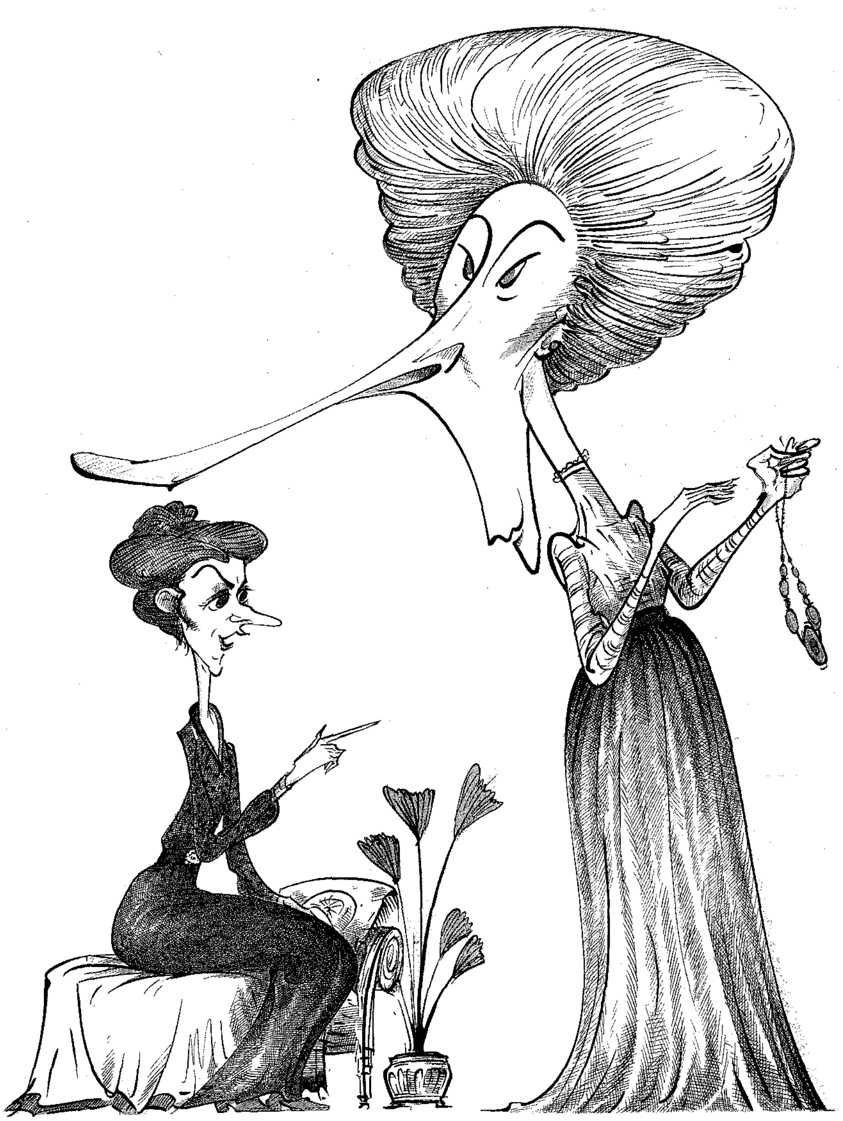
In the banter between the women, Mamet's idiom swings between the archaic and the contemporary; it allows him at once to use his huge vocabulary and to wink at it. Ten-cent words like "festooned," "rodomontade," "monomania," "piquant," "prating," "thither," "sweetmeats," and "bonne bouche" butt up against the brusque colloquial to terrific comic effect. "I pray you indulge me for a space," Anna says, after Claire has criticized her for her waning sexual appetite, "for I am going to set out on a speech which may have some duration, but whose theme may be gleaned from its opening phrase: HOW DARE YOU." Mamet manages both to employ and to parody the language of Victorian drawing-room melodrama and the privilege it betokens. "Are my seams straight?" Claire asks. "Euclidean," Anna replies. Although S. J. Perelman played a similar recherché linguistic game in "The Beauty Part" (1962), Mamet's method of mining the ironies of satire and speech is all his own. In Act I, for instance, when Claire delivers to Anna the unwelcome news that she has fallen in love with a younger woman, Anna goes into manipulative red alert. "How ill your disordered state becomes you," Claire says. "Tell it to the Marines," Anna answers.

"Boston Marriage" may be a capriccio, but it requires great technique to pull off. (This is the reason, incidentally, that it has taken Mamet so long to cast a production of the play for Broadway.) In this folderol, there is no psychological subtext for the actors to impart; the nature of the characters—that sense of willful self-inflation that makes the women sidesplitting foils for each other—is inherent in the breathing it takes to make Mamet's lines play. If the actors get the rhythms right (and, in this production, they sort of do), the very intakes of air necessary to speak the words at speed force them into the vain, strutting posture that is their characters' hilarious essence. In Mamet's serious work, language is opaque, probing, and ambiguous. Here it is all on the surface. His usual theatrical impulses have been turned upside down; even his notorious relish of the "F" word, which often profoundly belies his characters' impoverishment, is used here to belie their articulacy. At one point, near the beginning of Act II, Anna reluctantly agrees to lend her house to Claire for a sexual tryst with the younger woman—on the condition that she can watch through a peephole—but when the girl (who, it turns out, is the daughter of Anna's sugar daddy) gets spooked and bolts, Anna goes into a prolix, paranoid tailspin in front of the maid:

ANNA: Fell circumstance. Oh, how you chastise my presumption. I am undone. My protector will withdraw his stipend, as my lover, her love, and I shall starve, the hollow percussion of my purse, a descant to that of my broken heart. But once I was young and the world was before me. . . .
MAID: D'you mind if I work while you're talkin', miss? (*Pause.*) . . . 'Cause I can't, the life of me, tell what the fuck yer on about.

The expert British director Phyllida Lloyd is the master of Mamet's revels. She has a gift for exactly this kind of comic high style (she's done Congreve and Orton at the Royal National), and she keeps the romp ticking over nicely. The lovers' tiff takes place in Peter McKintosh's appropriately claustrophobic wallpapered drawing room, whose motif of block-printed red roses with blue stems matches the chintz upholstery. The chintz—a fabric Anna abhors but has chosen for her lover's sake—makes Claire's betrayal all the more galling. "It is for *you*," Anna says, rustling a bit of the detested design. "Do I expect thanks? I would be glad of mute appreciation. I receive nothing but the tale of your new rutting." She goes on, "For how can one cherish, nay, how can one respect one, however dear, however well-formed, who acts—so cruel. But yes, the engine of the world's betrayal, is it not?" Claire answers: "I'm sorry, what? Did I miss something?"

As a duo, Wanamaker, who is petite and gravel-voiced, and Chancellor, who is tall and somewhat more refined, have a whimsical comic silhouette. Neither is, by nature, a comedienne, and this prevents the evening from quite reaching the fizzy heights of the writing. Wanamaker has her best innings when she shifts her focussed energy from seductive frivolity with Claire to irked fury with the maid, Catherine (well played by Lyndsey Marshal, who almost steals the show from the sapphic squabblers). "What is it?" Anna says, interrupted in the middle of the quarrel by Catherine, a Scotswoman whom Anna persists in thinking Irish. "What do you want? Saving national sovereignty and reparations? What? An apology for your potato famine? IT CAME FROM THE LACK OF ROTATION OF CROPS!!!" Wanamaker fumes. "Do you think the soil can go on forever, giving. *Giving*." With the demure Marshal as her whipping girl, she growls her way to some big laughs. "Go away, or I'll have you killed," she threatens, and, when Catherine inadvertently reminds Anna of her age, "Oh, bite through your wrists and die." The role calls out for eccentricity—the kind of inspired, blinkered hauteur of, say, the young Maggie Smith, or of Jennifer Saunders, Joanna Lumley, or Maria Aitken. Despite her prowess, Wanamaker has neither the natural swank nor the lightness of touch to properly punch it up. And, for her part, Chancellor never quite hits the pure note of comic outrageousness. Nonetheless, she gets her gibes deftly under the wall of Anna's words. "Oh, how more than droll," she says, mocking one of Anna's insults; and when Anna claims to be younger than Claire she counters, "What? Have they repealed the *calendar*?"


GERALD SCARFE

As a duo, Anna Chancellor and Zoë Wanamaker have a whimsical comic silhouette.

Through their decorous verbal style—what Anna calls "the essential veil of decency"—Mamet shows speech imposing a carapace of reason on unreasoning desire; it's a happy sight. Chancellor, in particular, makes the most of it. When Anna suggests that they bake a pie with Claire's new young friend, Claire reads her bucolic fantasy only to send it up:

> CLAIRE: As she kneads the dough we may see the tendons now assemble now disperse beneath the nut-brown skin. She looks up: "I'm making a pie."...
>
> ANNA: Do you mock me?
>
> CLAIRE: I'm concocting a seduction. I do not require a pastry chef.

Mamet keeps this comic bubble afloat not only with his witty lines but with his witty structure. The women pass, by degrees, from desperation to frustration to collaboration to incarceration. In the play's last beats—a nod to Mamet's obsession with betrayal—we realize that Anna has conned Claire into prison with her. But here deceit leads to a happy ending; the confidence trick, which abuses trust to rob its victim, only robs the audience of its preconceived notion of the playwright himself. With brilliant economy and with his God-given ear for the exact rhythms of even mannered speech, Mamet enshrines a sense of blessing, not of barbarity; instead of dissecting life's viciousness, for once he dethrones its seriousness. "It is now my lot to attempt that most profoundly difficult of all human tasks," Anna says, pondering the prospect of jail. The contrite Claire replies, "To forgive one who has wronged you?" "No," Anna says, "to pack when rushed." ♦

DEATH BE NOT PROUD DEPARTMENT

From the magazine Chronicle of the Horse.

He started training horses—this time hunters and jumpers—again as soon as he returned to California, and in 1956 he moved into the Flintridge Riding Academy near Pasadena. He stayed there until his death, which didn't come until after he'd had five coronary bypass surgeries, two carotid artery surgeries and five wives.

POP MUSIC

I WANNA BE A GIRL

The Donnas turn twenty-one; the Go-Go's turn forty-two.

BY BEN GREENMAN

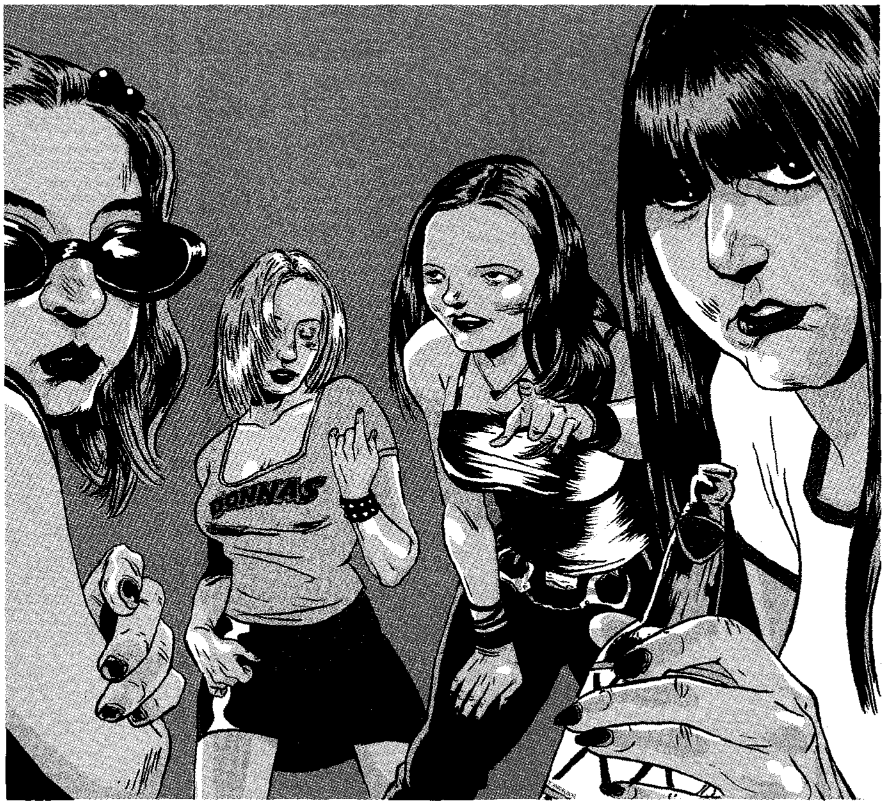
Moments before the Donnas' March show at New York's Bowery Ballroom, in the midst of a youngish crowd lousy with leather pants and tight T-shirts, a male audience member spotted Donna F, the beefy bass player, on the balcony. He asked her to pose for a picture; she obliged. Two women huddled nearby. "Oh, shit. What's her real name?" one said. "I studied up on this before I came out here."

The Donnas inspire this kind of devotion. For the last four years, they have been one of the *succès d'estimes* of the underground scene: an all-girl band that plays concise, sleazy anthems that draw on both the punk rock and the flash metal of the late nineteen-seventies. Their fourth album, "The Donnas Turn 21," shot to the top of the college-music charts when it was released in January. It was still hovering in the Top Ten at the time of the Bowery Ballroom show, when the house lights went down and the band, under cover of darkness, sneaked into position and began to play. Donna A, the tall, voluptuous front woman, bounced around in a snug blue top, flanked by Donna R (who played guitar with her head lowered and the hemline of her miniskirt raised) and Donna F (who wore an "Eat a Dick" T-shirt). The drummer, Donna C, flailed away at her drums so wildly that her high pigtails, which gave her the look of a Pekinese, exploded over her head like fireworks. During the first song, "Are You Gonna Move It for Me," enough of the audience mouthed the words to suggest that the Donnas are, if not exactly the voice of a generation, at least stubbornly lodged in the section of the collective mind reserved for reciting pop choruses.

It's about time. The girls may have recently turned twenty-one, but they have already been playing together longer than most veteran bands. Way back in the early nineties, when Korn and Limp Bizkit were just misspellings, a pair of eighth graders named Allison Robertson and Maya Ford decided to start a rock band for a talent contest at Jordan Middle School, in Palo Alto. They recruited two classmates, Torry Castellano and Brett Anderson, as their drummer and vocalist, respectively, and the foursome was soon playing professionally as Ragady Anne. After attracting the attention of a Bay Area producer, they renamed themselves the Donnas, rechristened one another accordingly—Robertson became Donna R, Ford became Donna F, and so on—and secured a recording contract, all before their eighteenth birthdays.

Bands that young can't get by on talent alone; they have to rely on taste. "The Donnas," the group's 1997 début album, reflected little more than the influence of the Ramones, the deliriously simple, back-to-basics band that had roared out of Forest Hills, Queens, more than two decades earlier. The Ramones rejected the bloat of mid-seventies popular music and, instead, on their first album, snarled their way through fourteen blissfully brief songs about baseball-bat assaults, glue-sniffing, and back-street romance. "The Donnas" also contained fourteen songs, none of which were much longer than two minutes, with titles like "Huff All Night" and "Teenage Runaway." There were echoes of the Ramones even in the album's packaging: the eponymous title, the hand-drawn lettering, the band members slouching and slack-jawed in black-and-white. Supplementing the Ramones fetish was a healthy interest in the Runaways, the nineteen-seventies all-female rock band whose teen-age members—including the future solo artists Lita Ford and Joan Jett—became big stars by singing about sex and drugs, just like the boys.

"American Teenage Rock 'n' Roll Machine," which was released the following year, stuck with this Ramones-meets-Runaways formula. The vocals were passionate but thin, the guitar solos were as messy as a girl's room, and the spirited, hapless drumming was like a recruiting poster for garage rock. Rock critics—thirty-something men, for the most part—were transfixed by the mixture of



As the Donnas grow up, their lyrics are more likely to swagger than to yearn.

postmodern coöptation and jailbait, and fell over themselves with praise. Even so, it seemed likely that the members of the band, having illustrated a point about the canny recovery of old rock-and-roll styles, would disappear into their adult lives, and probably onto the campuses of California's better universities.

But the Donnas didn't disappear. In 1999, they appeared in two successful teen comedies, "Jawbreaker" and "Drive Me Crazy," and released a third record, "Get Skintight," to even more positive reviews. The Donnas struck critics—and audiences—as genuine tough-girl articles in a pop-music world that seemed increasingly prefabricated and artificial. That this genuineness was largely copied from other bands was beside the point. At the Bowery Ballroom show, there were a number of Ramones T-shirts in evidence, one of which was stretched over the slim frame of a rather intense young man who was explaining the Donnas' punk pedigree to a bored woman who I hope, for his sake, wasn't his girlfriend.

The bulk of the Bowery Ballroom set was devoted to "Turn 21," which is packaged as a kind of rite of passage. The cover shows the four Donnas crammed into a night-club booth, sheathed in cocktail dresses, staring sullenly past a table full of empty glasses. (I count nine drinks for four girls, give or take a few shot glasses.) Apparently, the girls have been thinking while drinking. "Are You Gonna Move It for Me," the leadoff track, is a catchy ditty about an all-girl rock band that's growing uncomfortable with the attentions of lecherous male rock critics "three times my age." Compared with the songs on the first three records, it's self-conscious and rueful, the rock-and-roll equivalent of Lolita calling Humbert on the carpet.

The Donnas' increasing distance from their punk forebears can be measured in other terms as well. No fewer than four of the songs on the first Ramones record were artless first-person reports of what the members of the band did or did not want to do: "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend," "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement," and "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You." This syntax of desire became the Ramones' trademark; it turned up again in the group's greatest song, "I Wanna Be Sedated," and in its last gasp, a cover of Tom Waits's "I Don't Wanna Grow Up."

Initially, the Donnas did more than just respect this perspective. They copied it precisely—their early efforts included songs like "I Don't Wanna Go to School," "I Don't Wanna Rock 'n' Roll Tonight," and the convincing "I Wanna Be a Unabomber" ("I wanna be a Unabomber / History teacher, you're a goner / It's no fun to sit at home / Watching 90210"). These days, though, the lyrics are more likely to swagger than to yearn. "40 Boys in 40 Nights," an Arabian Nights of male groupies, has a cleverness that verges on smugness ("Have some now save some for later / But there's no cute boys in Decatur"). And the opening couplet of "Midnite Snack" rhymes "room" with "Oranjeboom." Is it a step forward or backward for a formerly doctrinaire pop-punk band to casually drop the name of a premium Dutch lager known only to the most dedicated beer enthusiasts? In the end, philosophical questions like this are probably better left unasked. The Donnas don't seem to care, and at the Bowery Ballroom, when Donna A set the microphone stand at an angle and leaned down to belt out "Play My Game," "Police Blitz," or any of the other songs from "The Donnas Turn 21," neither did the crowd. In fact, when the band dedicated "You've Got a Crush on Me" to "all the boys out there in the audience," the girls screamed, too, unwilling to be left out.

The Donnas took only four years to get to their fourth album. The Go-Go's took twenty. The legendary all-girl band, with its roots in punk-era Los Angeles, came to fame just as MTV broke big. During their peak, in the early eighties, the Go-Go's were the sweethearts of video—they brought Esther Williams-style waterskiing kitsch to "Vacation" and a casual glamour to "Our Lips Are Sealed." They also knew how to write near-perfect pop songs and enliven them with tight, bright harmonies. "Talk Show," the band's third record, was released in 1984, and revealed a maturing and deepening sound; there were fewer songs about parties and wild abandon and more songs about pondering the consequences of same.

Like the other great girl band of the eighties, the Bangles, the Go-Go's closed up shop after only three records—thanks largely to burnout from drugs, drinking, egos, and other "Behind the Music" plot conventions. It seemed unlikely that they would ever work together again. But you can't keep a Go-Go down. "God Bless the Go-Go's," due out next month from Beyond Music—the same label that engineered Blondie's comeback a few years ago—picks up right where "Talk Show" left off. Belinda Carlisle's vocals may be watery, but they're capable of a poignancy that places her in the company of the great female rock singers; she always seems to be teetering on the edge of sadness, even when the lyrics insist that she's ebullient. The harmonies are as strong as ever, as are the songs they are asked to serve. Silly title aside, "La La Land" is either a satire of lotus-flower Los Angeles or a sawtoothed boast about the band's return to the music scene, and "Here You Are" is a sweeping ballad with a porcelain melody.

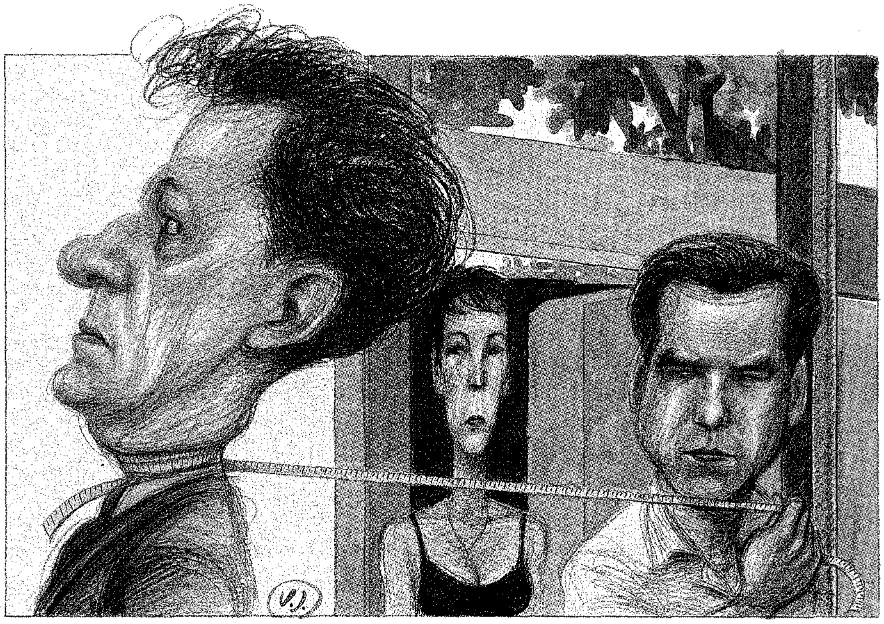
Despite the downtime, the band has resisted the temptation to deliver a manifesto. This is just another solid Go-Go's record, with a half-dozen sparkling pop songs sitting alongside other pop songs that are, unfortunately, de-sparkled by clunky lyrics. (The worst offenders are "Vision of Nowness"—it is a word, just not a good one—and "Throw Me a Curve," which pedantically, if justifiably, defends a mature woman's inalienable right to weigh more than the average supermodel.) When they were young, the Go-Go's stacked their strongest songs at the beginning of their records; now they have the canniness of veterans, and they save the best for last. The penultimate track, "Talking Myself Down," which has a hypnotic, slightly depressive melody and a quirky piano break, is an older, wiser sister of their best single, "Head Over Heels." And the album's closer, "Daisy Chain," is an all-out weeper, a nostalgic tour through the band's own history; it's the kind of sentimental, autobiographical rock that Mott the Hoople perfected in the seventies and that few bands have attempted since. Throughout, Carlisle's singing is superb, and the band sounds charged. It's enough to make a case for middle age. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

GOING TO THE DOGS

Grim farce in a le Carré story and in Mexico City.

BY ANTHONY LANE



Geoffrey Rush, Jamie Lee Curtis, and Pierce Brosnan in "The Tailor of Panama."

We have been here before. Pierce Brosnan stands in the M.I.6 headquarters, high above the River Thames, discussing his next assignment. His superior officer takes him to task: "The gambling debts, the blown cover, the wives . . ." Hang on. What is wrong with this picture? 007 gambles, of course, surrounded by monomaniac billionaires and mystery cleavages, but rarely does he run up anything so vulgar as *debts*. But then this is not James Bond we are looking at, and the film is not "The World Is Not Enough"; this is "The Tailor of Panama," directed by John Boorman from the novel by John le Carré, and Brosnan is playing Andy Osnard, a very different species of British agent. He describes his profession as "dark and lonely work, like oral sex, but someone has to do it." That's a funny line, although it would be even funnier if it hadn't been stolen from Joseph Heller's "God Knows."

Osnard is posted to Panama, where, far from being dark and lonely, he appears sociable and light on his feet. The country feels doubly besieged, not just by the predations of other states but also from within, by its own political sects. Osnard is perturbed by the corruption of the place, and especially by the thought that, for his purposes, it may not be corruptible enough. To this end, he employs the services of Harry Pendel (Geoffrey Rush)—tailor to the bigwigs of Panama, and privy to the offcuts of their gossip as well as the size of their waistlines. Taking his cue from Harry's eavesdropping, Osnard constructs a report on the "silent opposition" of the Panamanian underground, poised to strike a blow for democracy; he requests, and gets, backing from his own government, followed by military aid from the United States. Thus, on the word of Harry Pendel, America prepares for war.

There is one tiny, though not insurmountable, problem with the silent opposition. It does not exist; hence the silence. It was born in the Pendel brain, and jabbered into life on the Pendel tongue—what le Carré, in his novel, calls the "fluence" of his unlikely hero. Skittish, Jewish, slavishly fond of his wife, Louisa (Jamie Lee Curtis), Harry is one more tick on le Carré's long, engrossing list of creative liars. His books used to be full of people who were paid to fake and falsify on behalf of their sovereign nations, or, on a good day, of their wounded consciences; in recent years—ever since the publication of "A Perfect Spy"—the contagion has spread to other characters, unconnected with the intelligence trade. Although Harry proclaims himself to be a scion of Savile Row, he is an ex-con, jailed for arson, and the portrait of his partner, Braithwaite, that hangs on the shop wall is, in fact, his Uncle Benny—who, as played by a ghostly but still cocky Harold Pinter, pops up throughout the film to barrack his beleaguered nephew.

"The Tailor of Panama" is a strange, thick stew of a movie, alive with tricks and flavors that you weren't expecting, and that you don't always require. John Boorman began his directing career in the nineteen-sixties, and this new film has the air of something that he dreamed up in his youth—something larky and raffish, spiced with iconoclasm and cheek. We get the jabbing joke of the Pinter character; we get a speeded-up shot of Harry chalking fabric for a suit; we get platefuls of sex between Osnard and his colleague at the Embassy, Francesca (Catherine McCormack); above all, we get the bloody-minded nerve of Pierce Brosnan. In the book, Osnard is on the large side, "several points short of a Greek god," whereas Brosnan is a registered deity, whether he likes it or not. From the evidence of this movie, I suspect that he is already bored by the tuxedoed mantle of 007, for what is "The Tailor of Panama" if not a prolonged snook, cocked at the imperialist pretensions of the Bond franchise?

All this should make for high comedy; yet somehow the film takes a wrong turning and winds up as dispiriting farce. I enjoyed the spectacle, but I didn't believe it for a minute; fatally, the movie allows its vision of Central American chaos to become every bit as fantastical as the glamorous clichés that it means to supplant. The cynicism, or disappointed idealism, of le Carré—who wrote the script, with Boorman and Andrew Davies, and was also executive producer—tends to intensify as he looks beyond Europe, outside the glum fiefdoms of George Smiley and his ilk. (Which is where I like my le Carré; give me small men on rainy street corners, conducting the Cold War with collars turned up.) "The Tailor of Panama" was written with a broader, Fauvist brush, and, once the plot has been freed from the sly sarcasm of the printed page, we are left with what looks ominously close to paranoia. Dylan Baker, who has a couple of short scenes as an American general, turns them into a cartoon of swivel-eyed lunacy, and the film climaxes with dark helicopters bearing down on Panama City.

They are called back just in time, yet there remains the odd sensation of a movie that, like its absurd villains, has all sorts of designs on Panama but never settles down to telling us what the place is really like. If the background shifts and sizzles—there is nothing here as rooted and convincing as the hoggish South of Boorman's "Deliverance"—there is also confusion in the foreground. A novel can easily hold two figures as distinct as Harry Pendel and Andy Osnard, the nervous cloth cutter and the languid spy; but movies are more brutal and hierarchical, and we need to know where our attention should primarily lie. "Welcome to Panama," Harry says, adding, "Casablanca without heroes." A great line, but who would want to go to Rick's place without Rick?

If you want the real thing—if you want a city brought so close that you need to take a shower afterward—then brace yourself for "Amores Perros," which was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards. Directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, this long, heartfelt howl of a movie is set in Mexico City, where the local tourist board must be going crazy. We start with a thumping car crash, and then work backward to uncover the various lives that have intersected at the point of impact. There are three pairs of characters: Octavio (Gael García Bernal) and his sister-in-law Susana (Vanessa Bauche); Daniel (Alvaro Guerrero) and his new lover, Valeria (Goya Toledo); and El Chivo (Emilio Echevarría) and Maru (Lourdes Echevarría)—father and daughter in both fiction and fact. The first couple are bullish and proletarian, the second swish and bored; Valeria is a famous model who loses a leg, and, however sorry we feel for her, it's as nothing compared with how sorry she feels for herself.

That section is the slowest and feeblest of the three, and it's a relief to reach the magnificent final part of the triptych: the tale of El Chivo, who was once a guerrilla and is now a tramp. He will kill for money, although money is the last thing he wants. If there were any justice, Emilio Echevarría would have joined Javier Bardem and Benicio del Toro on Oscar night as the third Hispanic acting nominee; you warm to his noble shagginess, but then he does something mean or morally grimy to throw you off balance and turn you against him. The other characters are class-bound; he's more like a refugee from classical mythology, or a tragic descendant of the hobo in Renoir's "Boudu Saved from Drowning." Echevarría offers a modest portrait of a proud man, and you will not forget the final shot of him padding away into a black, crusty Mexican moonscape—is that the end of the world, or the start of a new one?

You should see this film, although it seems fair to assume that Doris Day will not be joining you. An opening announcement reassures viewers that all the animals were treated humanely; that sounds admirable, until you see what some of the humans are like. The first part of "Amores Perros" is about dogfighting—a sport, or a sin, that brings big money to Octavio (whose bruised beauty grows on you) and his pet monster, Cofi. You could lay a thousand dollars on Godzilla beating Cofi and go home with empty pockets. The moral of the movie is unambiguous: life's a bitch and death is a Rottweiler the size of a Jeep, with a nice sideline in making dog food out of other people's dogs. Is all this too much? Well, yes, but Iñárritu, making his first feature film, convinces you that Mexico City itself is far too much—unignorable, blood-hot, an eternal competition between bark and bite. The Tailor of Panama would take one look and run home with a chunk chewed out of his pants. ◆

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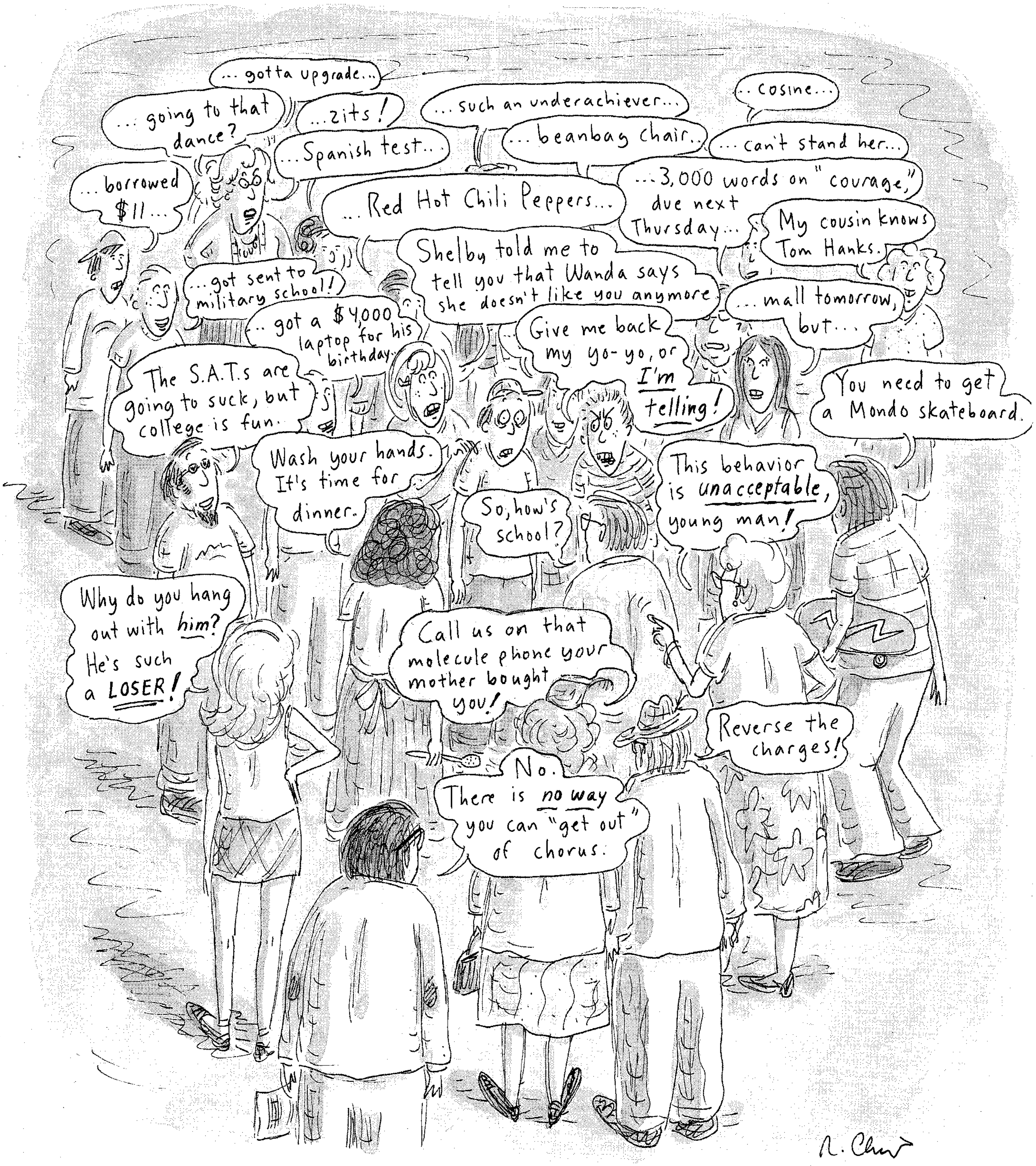
SURROUNDSOUND


... gotta upgrade...
... going to that dance?
... zits!
... such an underachiever...
... cosine...
... Spanish test...
... beanbag chair...
... can't stand her...
... borrowed $11...
... Red Hot Chili Peppers...
... 3,000 words on "courage," due next Thursday...
My cousin knows Tom Hanks.
Shelby told me to tell you that Wanda says she doesn't like you anymore
... got sent to military school!
... got a $4,000 laptop for his birthday...
... mall tomorrow, but...
Give me back my yo-yo, or *I'm telling*!
The S.A.T.s are going to suck, but college is fun.
You need to get a Mondo skateboard.
Wash your hands. It's time for dinner.
So, how's school?
This behavior is *unacceptable*, young man!
Why do you hang out with *him*? He's such a *LOSER*!
Call us on that molecule phone your mother bought you!
Reverse the charges!
No. There is *no way* you can "get out" of chorus.

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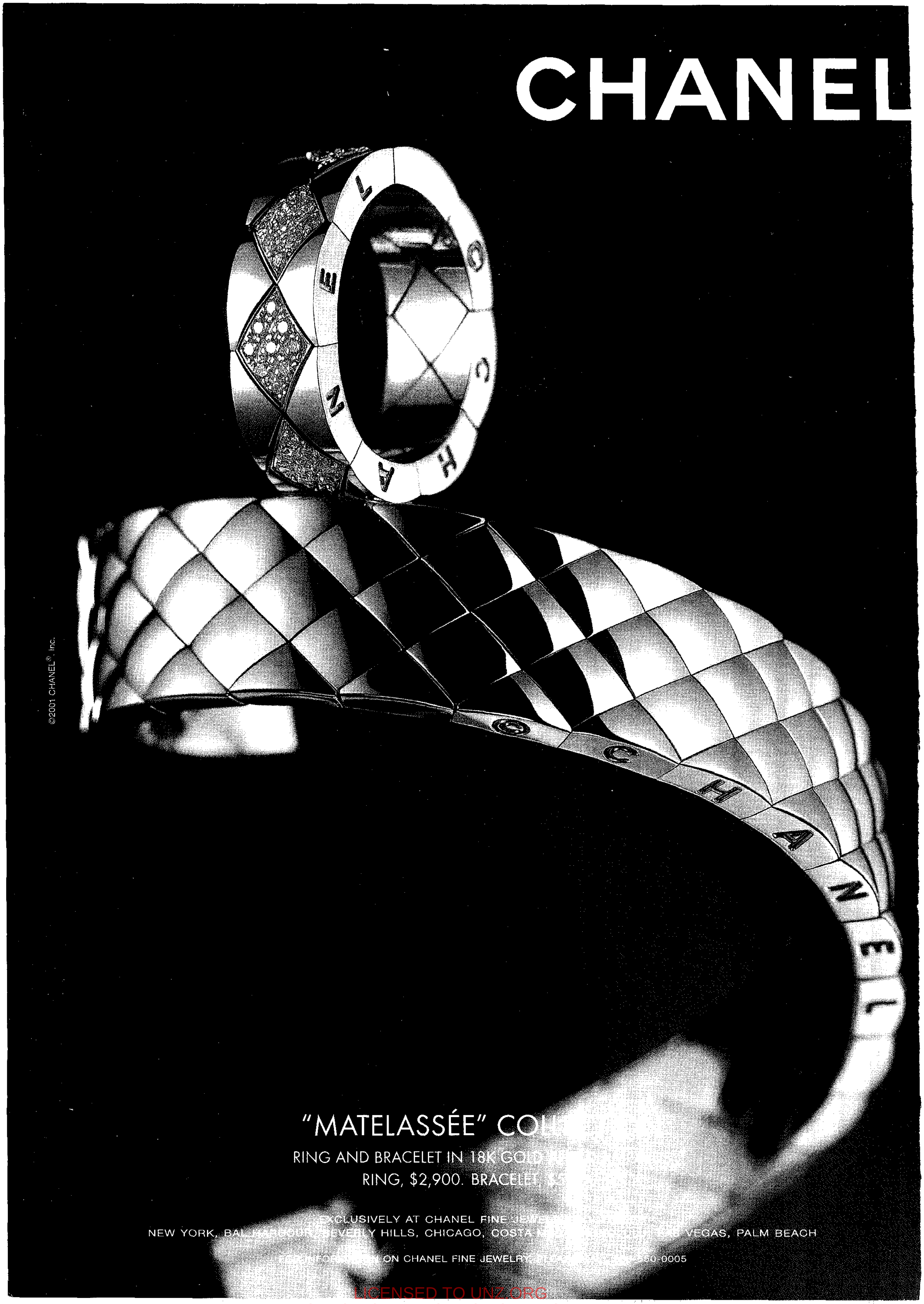

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